

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1914

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

WEDNESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER, 1914.

The SPEAKER (Hon. W. D. Armstrong, *Lockyer*) took the chair at half-past 3 o'clock.

PAPERS.

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

Return under the Mining Machinery Advances Act.

Annual report of the Commissioner of Public Health to 30th June, 1914.

Report on the Diamantina Hospital for Chronic Diseases.

QUESTIONS.

CONTROL OF PRICES BOARD, SOUTHERN DIVISION.

Mr. RYAN (*Barcoo*) asked the Chief Secretary—

“Is he aware that the prices fixed by the board appointed for dealing with the fixing of prices in the Southern division are in many instances higher than the prevailing prices?”

The PREMIER (Hon. D. F. Denham, *Oxley*) replied—

“I am informed that certain retailers are offering goods for cash at less than the prices fixed by the board, which prices are the maximum prices that may be charged for ordinary household terms.”

CONTROL OF PRICES BOARD, NORTHERN DIVISION.

Mr. FOLEY (*Mundingburra*) asked the Chief Secretary—

“1. What are the names of the gentlemen appointed on the board in the Northern district under the Control of Trade Act?”

“2. What are the qualifications of these gentlemen to hold these positions?”

The PREMIER replied—

“1. See ‘Government Gazette’ of 2nd September, 1914, No. 88.

“2. Knowledge of values and of factors controlling cost of landing goods at Northern ports.”

APPOINTMENTS TO CONTROL OF PRICES BOARDS.

MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT.

The SPEAKER: I have to announce that I have received the following letter:—

“Legislative Assembly,

“Queensland, 9th September, 1914.

“The Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Queensland.

“Dear Sir,—I beg to give notice that I intend to move the adjournment of the House this day in order to discuss a definite matter of urgent public import-

ance—namely, the nature of some of the appointments made to the board of control for regulating prices under the Control of Trade Act of 1914, and the prices fixed by proclamation under the said Act.

“Yours truly,

“J. T. RYAN.”

Mr. RYAN: I beg to move that this House do now adjourn.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion supported?

More than five members having risen in their places,

Mr. RYAN said: The object of my motion this afternoon, Sir, is to give an opportunity of debating the matter which is referred to in the letter which you have just read; that is, the nature of some of the appointments made to the boards of control for regulating prices under the Control of Trade Act of 1914 and the prices fixed by proclamation under the said Act. It recently became the duty of Parliament to pass the measure which is referred to in that letter, for the purpose of preventing any undue rise in the price of commodities—any rise which is not justified in the circumstances in which we are placed. When that measure was before the House I supported it, and I think it received the support of most hon. members in the House; but it was pointed out that a very necessary matter in connection with it was that a competent board should be appointed which would carry out the objects of the measure. In speaking on the matter, I drew special attention to that fact. It will be seen from a reference to “Hansard” of this session, page 657, that I said—

“In a crisis like the present I think such a measure is absolutely necessary, and I only trust that in its administration, when it is passed, any appointments which may be made under it will be such as will meet with the approval of all parties in politics, because the basis on which the Bill is founded is that there shall be a board established having authority to make inquiries as to the prices at which all the general necessities of life shall be disposed of; and it is highly desirable that whoever constitutes a board shall have the confidence of all parties in politics and of the general community.”

We all know that unless a measure of this kind is properly administered, it is practically worse than useless. We on this side maintain that a board of this kind is quite within the realm of practical politics at any time, but more particularly at a time like this. Now, several appointments were made to the boards in the South, the Centre, and the North, and it will be far from my intention to cast any reflection upon the personal integrity of any of the gentlemen who have been appointed to these boards, but I think it was necessary in making the appointments that due regard should be had to the interests of the consumers, and that persons should be appointed who, from their capacity and environment, would be likely to do what would be a fair deal, and whose decision would meet with the approval of all classes in the community. We know that there are many tradesmen—and I desire to say that in my place in the House this afternoon—who are amongst the most honourable men

in the community, and I have no desire whatever to make any reflection upon the tradespeople of Queensland. It is necessary for me to say that, because I know that there are some who endeavour to fix on to this party a charge of making a general attack upon a particular class in the community without justification. The fact that the Bill was necessary—and necessarily with the consent of all parties in the House—shows that there are some people who require to have their dealings with the public watched and regulated in the present circumstances. Certain gentlemen have been appointed to these boards. I notice that Mr. Watson is described as a broker, whose business, I believe, brings him mainly into contact with merchants, and whose interest would be likely to bias him, even unconsciously, in favour of the merchant instead of the consumer. Mr. Parkes and Mr. Thorpe have been appointed members of the Townsville Board, and I believe that from their associations they are more likely to watch and safeguard the interests of persons selling than the interests of persons buying. I understand that Mr. Thorpe was—if he does not hold the position now—secretary of the Association of Traders and of the Master Butchers' Association.

Mr. ARCHER: Don't they want to study both?

Mr. RYAN: Undoubtedly they should study both, and a person appointed a member of such a board should have no leaning towards the interests of either party. When you appoint a person a member of a Meat Board, you would hardly appoint the secretary of the Master Butchers' Association, as has been done, I believe, in the case of Mr. Thorpe. Nor would you appoint Mr. Parkes, who, I believe, holds some position in connection with the Association of Traders in the North. These appointments have not met with the approval of the public, and however painful the duty may be, it is the duty of a public man to voice the sentiments of the public on all occasions of this kind. But the main objection in this matter is to the proclamation which has been issued fixing the prices of some commodities at a higher rate than the goods can now be actually obtained for. I want no further evidence of that than the admission of the Premier this afternoon in reply to my question, that the prices fixed by the Southern Board are higher than the prices for which certain goods are now obtainable.

The PREMIER: For cash.

Mr. RYAN: Yes, for cash, from certain tradesmen. Does the hon. gentleman suggest that the prices fixed by the board are prices for sales on credit? How can a merchant be compelled to sell his goods on credit at those prices? It is impossible. I should like to call attention to some of the prices fixed by the board. I find that the wholesale price of sugar to-day is £20 15s.—that is, 1A sugar—and that the retail selling price at the time at which the board made their report on which the proclamation was subsequently founded was 2½d. per lb., showing a profit to the retailer of a little over 12 per cent, out of which he has, of course, to pay the expenses of employees, rent, and other charges incurred in the ordinary course of his business.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: What per cent. does that amount to?

Mr. RYAN: That is not relevant to the question I am dealing with.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: Very relevant.

Mr. RYAN: Not at all. The retail price of sugar at the date the board made their report upon which the proclamation was founded was 2½d. per lb., and the board fixed the maximum retail price at 2½d. per lb. That put the price ¼d. per lb. above the ruling retail price at the date of their report, which raised the price practically 23 per cent., and the deduction to be made for the expenses of the retailer would be the same as when the price charged was 2½d. per lb. The tendency will be for this maximum price to become the minimum price; traders will naturally raise their prices to the price fixed by the board.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: Oh, no.

Mr. RYAN: If that is not so there is no need for the board. What need is there for a board which fixes prices higher than the ruling prices? The Act was passed with the view of trying to keep prices within a reasonable limit.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: Maximum prices.

Mr. RYAN: The controlled prices.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: The traders will do a fair thing.

Mr. RYAN: It is significant that it is a prominent merchant who is interjecting.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: He understands the matter.

Mr. RYAN: I am speaking on behalf of the consumer, and I believe I am voicing the opinions of the vast majority of the people of Queensland in this matter. I may give a further instance: Self-raising flour is one of the items the board has dealt with, and I notice that at the time of their report the price charged was 4½d. per packet, and that the price fixed by the board is 5d., which is a rise of 11 per cent.

Mr. ARCHER: Where was that price—in the North or in the Centre?

Mr. RYAN: In the Southern division of the State. The proclamation has not been made in regard to the other divisions. I have said nothing about the Central Board.

Mr. GRANT: Are you satisfied with them?

Mr. RYAN: I am only referring to the proclamation issued for the South as a result of the report of the board for that division. I did make some remarks about the personnel of the Northern Board, but said nothing about prices in that division. The retail price of condensed milk was 7d. per tin at the time the board made their report, and they have fixed the price at 7½d. per tin, which means a rise of 7 per cent.

Mr. FORSYTH: There are different brands of condensed milk, and, of course, they differ in price.

Mr. RYAN: There are many instances in which this board, instead of reducing the price, have raised it above what was actually asked by a good number of retail traders. I think it is to the credit of those retailers that they were selling at a price lower than that fixed by the board. The position is that, as a result of the war, there was a rise in the price of some commodities, and the board come along and say to those vendors that they may still further rise their prices, and

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the natural inclination of retailers will be to raise prices accordingly. Thus the board will prevent the object of the measure being carried out, that is, that the board should protect the public. Moreover, apparently, the report of this board deals only with retail prices, and does not deal with wholesale prices. The retailer should be protected against the wholesale men, otherwise he will not be able to keep his prices down to a proper limit. Therefore, I think it is the duty of the board to inquire more than they have done into the wholesale prices.

Mr. FORSYTH: They have done so; they have all the quotations from the wholesale houses.

Mr. RYAN: They may have all the quotations, but they should fix what the wholesale price to the retailer shall be.

Mr. GRANT: The Central District Board examined wholesale men.

Mr. RYAN: They may have done their duty perfectly well in that respect.

Mr. FORSYTH: The board have done their duty here, too.

Mr. RYAN: I am not making comments upon the Central Board. I think the boards should all direct their attention to the wholesale prices, and that they should certainly not fix prices above what are being paid. We see nothing in the evidence that came before this board that the retailers asked that the prices should be raised, but this board has raised the maximum prices, and practically invited the retailers to raise the prices of their goods. I regard the matter as one of very urgent public importance, and I believe that, perhaps, the Chief Secretary will so regard it, and it is imperatively necessary that Parliament, at this early juncture, should give an intimation of what their feeling is upon the matter, so that we may have no further rise in prices, or rise in maximum prices, as has been done up to the present. I notice from an examination of the Press reports of the inquiries going on before the board that questions are sometimes asked in such a way that the persons interrogated are told that they need not answer if they like, that perhaps it would be just as well if they did not answer, and, consequently, some of them have refused to answer questions.

Mr. GRANT: Are those the only items?

Mr. RYAN: No. I do not want to keep the House by stating all of them. I have stated a few, and I say that there are more on the same lines.

Mr. HAMILTON: If they were the only ones, they have no right to do it.

Mr. RYAN: But they are not the only ones. I do not think it is necessary that I should go into the others, and I have no doubt that there are many other hon. members on this side who will be able to refer to these matters before the debate is concluded. The price of meat is one that I have no doubt will have to be dealt with—and we hear a great deal about the impossibility of the butchers making profits. But I find from a perusal of the price lists that in some cases there are very wide discrepancies. I have one here issued by the Redbank Freezing Works, as from the 7th September instant, and I also have a booked price list of a butcher here. Comparing them, I find that the Redbank Freezing Works will supply

brisket with bone at 2½d., whereas we find that the butcher's price for brisket with bone is 4½d.

Mr. ARCHER: Do you know the differences between the conditions of their trade?

Mr. RYAN: Yes, I do; but I think that the difference in price is too great. One is 2½d. and the other is 4½d. Take fillet steak; I find that the Redbank price is 7½d., and the price here is 11d.

Mr. MORGAN: Why do not the people buy from Redbank?

Mr. RYAN: Many people do buy from Redbank, but I am just pointing out that Redbank can supply you with meat at very much cheaper rates than it is supplied by retail in Brisbane, and the discrepancy is too great to be accounted for by working expenses. I quite appreciate the significance of the hon. member for Normanby's interjection. It is an intelligent interjection and I must meet it. And I meet it in this way—that the discrepancy is too great, and consequently the board should deal with the price in such a way that it will be reduced and meat will be brought more within the reach of the average consumer. I think the subject is a very important one, one that we are bound to call attention to, and one which I think Parliament is bound to discuss in the spirit in which it is brought up. It is brought up to protect the consumer—the great body of the consumers in Queensland—from any unjustified rise in prices. I therefore move “That this House do now adjourn.”

The PREMIER: I do not think that there is any occasion for the House to adjourn. That the matter of the prices of foods is one of considerable public importance I at once admit. The Bill which was passed through the Chamber the week before last was passed for the purpose of protecting the consuming community, and I think the operations of the board accomplish that purpose. From various parts of the States we were advised that abnormal prices were being charged, and it was to prevent any such irregular proceedings that the Bill was passed through the Chamber. To make the Act operative and effective, boards competent to deal with the question had to be provided. It was not at all a question of politics. The hon. member, in his opening remarks, said that in his speech on the second reading he urged that the board should have the approval of all parties in politics. It is not a question of politics at all. It is a question of qualification, and the qualifications of the members comprising each board are of the very highest and the hon. member has not assailed their ability. He certainly has not impugned their integrity. He has given us two instances—sugar and self-raising flour.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Meat and milk.

The PREMIER: Meat and milk also. Did he say bacon, too? Because, if he did, I would remind him that a gentleman who has been most active in the recent Federal election gave evidence and said that he had to increase the price of bacon. Why? Because of an economic factor coming in—the law of supply and demand. The board determines the highest prices that may be charged, and whilst the “Gazette” says that certain prices may be charged, yet you can go into the shops that a fortnight ago advertised certain cash prices and get the goods at

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identically those prices to-day. The maximum has not become the minimum in this case. By no means. Prices are largely governed by competition, and the competition to-day is just as keen as it was a fortnight ago, and the board controlling prices is composed of men who are familiar with the landing charges and first costs, and can determine that such-and-such is a fair value as the highest price. And it has to be remembered that the business of the board is to determine the highest price at which goods may be sold. Those are the terms of the Act. We know quite well that there is quite a variety of shops in this city. There are some known as cash shops, whose sales are wholly for cash. There are others which give a certain amount of credit; whether it is thirty or sixty days, I do not know. But depend upon it, if the price fixed were to be for spot cash, which evidently hon. members opposite wish, then a good many people who have been getting accommodation from grocers could not get that accommodation.

Mr. BERTRAM: No grocer is charging more than 2½d. for sugar.

The PREMIER: Then, what harm is done? If the hon. member is correct and the board have fixed the price at 2½d., and grocers are still selling at 2½d., it only shows that grocers are dealing honourably.

Mr. RYAN: What good is a board in that case?

Mr. FORSYTH: It depends on the quality, again.

The PREMIER: The board has to fix a maximum beyond which goods may not be offered. The complaints of excessive prices did not originate in the city. I cannot recall a complaint from Brisbane, but I had numerous complaints from the far South-west, and the near West and also from the North, where it was said that extraordinary figures were being asked. The effect of the operation of this Act has been to stop such predatory movements on the community. Now, take the question of flour, which the hon. member did not mention, because it is not on the list. The board named a price which appeared to me last Thursday or Friday to be very high, and I asked them to look into that once more, but

[4 p.m.] I should judge that I was quite wrong from the price now being quoted down South. The idea of this board was not to put the prices at a figure which would curtail accommodation to those who are needing accommodation; the board have to take all factors into consideration, and so it is that, generally speaking, I think it will be found that the figures issued have been wisely determined. I have not any doubt that had I the opportunity, and I had not—the hon. member gave me notice of his motion when I was engaged elsewhere—had I the opportunity or should it present itself again, I can readily tell this Chamber exactly what led the board to make 2½d. per lb. the price in regard to sugar, or in other cases cited to raise prices. In regard to self-raising flour, I think I know the reason at once—one of the ingredients put into that commodity has risen greatly in price. The board has a full knowledge of the laid-down prices of goods landed from overseas, and the prices of goods raised in the State or brought from the Southern States, and they know what is a fair price

to fix, and as far as my knowledge goes—it is very imperfect; quite as imperfect as that of the hon. member on matters of household consumption—as far as I know this board has acted with impartiality and with fairness, and to attempt at this stage to dictate to the board—that they should ignore the evidence because of mere political pressure—the hon. member said the board is defective because all shades of politics are not there.

Mr. RYAN: I did not say that.

The PREMIER: The hon. member said that the board, to be satisfactory, should meet with the approval of all parties of politics.

Mr. RYAN: And the general community.

The PREMIER: And the general community. I do not know the politics of these various members.

Mr. BERTRAM: What are the politics of Mr. Watson?

The PREMIER: The question was not raised.

Mr. BERTRAM: Was he not the chairman of one of your political meetings?

The PREMIER: At one time, yes. (Opposition laughter.) I do not know the politics of the other gentlemen. I have not the remotest idea, and I do not care, and I am quite sure that in Mr. Watson we have not only a man who knows his business—which is the most important thing—but also a man who is perfectly fair and honourable and upright. There really was nothing to reply to in the hon. member's speech. The board has not done anything to merit the motion for adjournment. The board referred to is a thoroughly capable board; they know their business, and I have no desire that they should determine other than fair prices—if so, it would lead to a good deal of discomfort and inconvenience on the part of householders. And as to wholesale—well, at present we are only concerned with what the retailer asks the community to pay.

Mr. LENNON: Is not the retailer forced by the wholesaler?

The PREMIER: As a rule, the householders do not go from shop to shop to find what the price of rice or tea is. They go to one shop and buy at the price asked; but the retailer, when he makes his purchases, will go all round and find out. One thing at a time; we cannot settle all issues at once. The first business of the board—and I think we are the first State in Australia to bring our prices out—the first thing the board had to do was to deal with the most used commodities of the consuming community, and if the retailers find that the wholesalers are putting any pressure on them, we can then act. Having dealt with the retailers, we can go back to the wholesalers and deal with them. At the present time the board are merely concerning themselves with the retailer, and they are not fixing as their highest price the cash price. The hon. member has a price list in his hand at the present moment, probably issued by one of the city cash stores, but he would not expect some storekeeper in the suburbs who gives a month or two months' credit, and if men happen to get out of employment to carry them on with three or four months' credit—he would not expect that storekeeper to do all the booking,

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keep the accounts, run the risks, and sell goods at cash prices. It would do a lot of harm to the community at the present time if there was a price fixed at which it was impossible for that storekeeper to serve his customers and give them the terms which they have been accustomed to have, or if by reason of unemployment to extend those terms. I shall inquire to-morrow on what grounds the board found for 2½d. in respect of sugar, or on what grounds they found 7½d. in respect of milk.

Mr. THEODORE: You might ask on what grounds you appointed partisan men.

The PREMIER: I answer that question at once. They are not partisans; they are intelligent men, eminently qualified men, with whom the hon. member has very little affinity or alliance.

Mr. THEODORE (*Chillagoe*): The Premier has made a very weak defence against the charge made by the leader of the Opposition. The Government has absolutely betrayed its trust in regard to this matter. The House entrusted the Government with certain obligations with regard to the appointment of boards for the control of trade. At that time it reposed in the Government absolute trust, because it gave carte blanche so far as the appointments to the board were concerned, and we find the Government has been lacking in its duty when we have regard to the character of the men who have been appointed to those boards, and the work they have done. After studying carefully the attitude taken up by the members of the board in Brisbane during its three or four sittings, its attitude to the witnesses, and the questions that have been asked, I am perfectly satisfied in my mind that at least two of those men have a distinct bias in favour of those who are interested in keeping prices up. The Premier says that the board has been fixing the maximum price, and that the maximum is not the minimum; that though they have fixed the maximum prices higher than those current now for certain lines, there is no necessity for the retailer to charge those prices. Common sense dictates to anyone who studies the question that the retailers will be compelled to charge the maximum prices fixed by the board, because the wholesalers will compel the retailers to charge right up to the maximum. The evidence is clear enough to any competent man to arrive at the conclusion that the wholesaler will charge the fullest maximum price fixed by the board, and the board has no justification in fixing the maximum beyond that which should be charged under any circumstances.

The PREMIER: They must regard them as perfectly fair.

Mr. THEODORE: They regard as perfectly fair the fixing of a price for sugar at ½d. per lb. higher than what it can be purchased for in any part of the State without any apparent reason, and, apparently, without any investigation, because there was no evidence taken on the question of sugar at any sittings of the board. I am satisfied that the Government have not done the fair thing to the consumers of Queensland by the appointment of these boards. They make it perfectly clear that their sympathies are with the men whose business it is to keep up prices. There are men on the Southern and Northern boards—and I say this advisedly

—who have all their sympathies with the men whose business it is to keep up prices. That is quite clear to a large number of people in Queensland to-day. Mr. Watson, the chairman of the Southern board, about whom the hon. gentleman was speaking just now, depends for his business upon the very class of business people whose interest it is to keep up prices.

The TREASURER: That is utterly untrue.

Mr. THEODORE: I say that Mr. Watson depends for his business on those whose interest it is to keep up prices.

The TREASURER: I say that is incorrect.

Mr. LENNON: He is a broker.

The PREMIER: Well, if he is a broker, he knows what the values are.

Mr. THEODORE: The statement I make is perfectly true as to his dependence upon the business people of Brisbane for his own business, and it is perfectly unassailable. One of the members of the Southern board, in asking questions of the witnesses, made it very clear as to what was the state of his mind regarding the question of raising prices or reducing prices of commodities. Ernest Barstow, retail butcher, gave evidence yesterday or the day before, and he said he was a member of the Master Butchers' Association. He said in answer to questions that an extra 1d. per lb. was put on the price of meat to cover the cost of booking and delivery. Then there was a witness named Peter McKinnon, a West End retail butcher, and the chairman addressing him, said: "In order to save yourself from Dunwich, what steps must you take—go out of the business or raise the price of meat?" and the witness answered "Yes." The chairman by that very question made it clear that his sympathy was with the retailer raising prices, because he asked the witness if he would not have to either raise the price of meat or go out of business if he wished to save himself from Dunwich. That practically meant that in order to save himself from insolvency he would have to raise the price of meat or go out of business, and the witness answered "Yes." The evidence of the retail butchers goes to show that there is some value in the by-products which the hon. member for Wide Bay said the other day were valueless. The evidence shows that at the present time they are not valueless at all.

Mr. BOOKER: I never said any such thing.

Mr. THEODORE: It is very significant the way the chairman asked his questions of the various witnesses. I direct my remarks to the chairman of the Southern board, because I regard the attitude which he adopted as being that of a man who is biased towards those men whose business it is to keep up prices. A representative of the Brisbane Grocers' Association said that the retail price of kerosene was 4s. 9d. per tin, and it was being sold at that price in the Brisbane shops. The chairman of the board, Mr. W. P. Watson, said that that was all right, as the kerosene was being sold on credit. He also said that the prices fixed by the board only applied to cash sales: for booking the retailers could charge whatever they liked.

The PREMIER: The price gazetted is the highest price they can charge.

Mr. THEODORE: It is quite evident that the chairman of the Southern Board thought that the retailers could charge what price

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they liked for the business they were booking. The chairman of the board is evidently under a misapprehension and I am glad to hear the Chief Secretary correcting him in that. If the regulations are only made to apply to purchasers on a cash basis, then it will only apply to about 25 per cent. of the business done with the grocers and storekeepers. The Chief Secretary said he was not concerned about anything else at present except the price charged by the retailers. It is known to members of this House that the wholesalers have increased their prices since the outbreak of hostilities. Whether there is any justification for the increases put on by the wholesalers remains to be seen, still no one doubts that those increases were made. The flour millers may be quoted as an example of it. We know that the wholesalers have increased the price of flour.

The PREMIER: The wheat-growers will not sell their wheat.

Mr. THEODORE: Under this Bill they should be compelled to sell their wheat.

The PREMIER: The wheat is brought from the South.

Mr. THEODORE: The Government must deal with that matter, too. We know that the Dominion Flour Milling Company have got large stocks of flour on hand.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: But they have contracts to carry out.

Mr. THEODORE: That may be so, but they are asking more for their flour than they were asking in July. That is a fact which the board must take into consideration when they are fixing retail prices. They must take into consideration what the retailer has to pay for his flour to the wholesaler, because, if the wholesaler increases his prices out of all fairness, how can they arrive at a fair price which the retailer must charge? They must take everything into consideration. The Premier is only concerned with the retailer.

The PREMIER: They had to deal with one thing first, and that is the consumer. He is the most important person.

Mr. THEODORE: The hon. gentleman has no sympathy at all with the small retailer. When a hard-and-fast price is fixed for the retailer, he is squeezed between the upper and nether millstone. The nether millstone is the maximum price he can charge for his goods and the upper millstone is the wholesaler. There is no protection to the retailer at all at present. Some time in the dim and distant future, the hon. member has stated, he will take into consideration the prices of the wholesaler. There is no doubt that the Government have not done their duty. This House, without any hesitation whatever, enabled the Government to suspend the Standing Orders and pass a Bill through all stages in one day in order to facilitate in every possible manner the carrying out of this legislation. The House placed in the hands of the Government tremendous powers, which would probably not have been placed in the hands of the Government under ordinary circumstances without some safeguard, but it was deemed to be urgent and important, and the powers were imposed in the Government to carry it out. The Government have betrayed the powers imposed in them.

The PREMIER: No.

Mr. THEODORE: We naturally expected that these boards would be constituted of gentlemen about whom nothing could be said from the point of fairness.

The PREMIER: You cannot say anything else about the boards that have been appointed.

Mr. THEODORE: I do not say that they are willingly biased or corrupt, but they have given evidence that they are biased in a certain direction. The chairman of the board is biased, as he showed by the questions which he asked of the witnesses. He gives manifestations of his sympathy by his questions to the witnesses before they give their evidence. This man, whether consciously or unconsciously, entirely prejudged the case. He prejudged the whole issue so far as the prices of meat are concerned. With regard to the Northern Board, I can say of at least two of the members, Messrs. Thorpe and Parkes, that they are likely to be biased in favour of people whose business it is to keep up prices. I make a prediction that when the list of prices is published for the Northern division, it will be an increase on the prices which are at present charged in Townsville.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: You are prejudging them.

Mr. THEODORE: I know those two men, and I have no confidence in them whatever. I think the Government deserve the severest criticism for appointing those two men. Which of the three Northern men represent the interests of the consumer?

The PREMIER: All three of them.

Mr. THEODORE: Well, one is a representative of the Master Traders' Association, so how can he be a representative of the consumers?

The PREMIER: Who is that?

Mr. THEODORE: Mr. Thorpe. He represents the Traders' Association.

The PREMIER: I did not know that.

Mr. THEODORE: The hon. gentleman should have known that before he appointed him to the board. He has been a representative of the Master Traders' Association in Townsville for some time, or of the Merchants' Association. And the hon. member expects a gentleman like that to be able to take an impartial view of the question of prices for foodstuffs.

The PREMIER: He would know what the real values were.

Mr. THEODORE: I admit he would know all about that part of the business, but that is not the only qualification that is necessary.

The PREMIER: It is a very important qualification.

Mr. THEODORE: There are a lot of other qualifications that are necessary. I am not saying that the three members of the Southern Board do not know a lot about the business of fixing prices.

The PREMIER: That is the main issue.

Mr. THEODORE: That is not the main issue. I say the main issue is getting men who must be fair. If you select men whose interests it is to keep up prices, you will have men who cannot be impartial in a matter of this sort.

Mr. KESSELL: Did you ever hear of such a thing as an honest man?

Mr. THEODORE: I have not lately heard of one coming from Port Curtis. This is a

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matter that must necessarily have been brought up early. It is no use allowing the evil to continue, and afterwards complaining. It is quite obvious to large numbers of people that the boards are not doing what they were expected to do. They are not regulating prices and fixing them on a fair plane, and they are assisting those whose interests it is to increase prices. There can be no justification for fixing maximum prices which are higher than the prices now charged. The board should have conducted its proceedings openly, so that the public would know exactly why prices were being increased—why, for instance, the price of sugar was fixed at 4d. per lb. above the prices now charged. There is a whole list of articles—rice, barley, sultanas, self-raising flour, kerosene, milk, and oatmeal, and a number of others, which can be purchased in the city to-day for less than the prices fixed by the board.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: On what terms?

Mr. THEODORE: They can be purchased at any of the shops.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: Those are the retail prices for cash.

Mr. KESSELL: Do you think the retailers will all raise their prices?

Mr. THEODORE: I say that will be the natural tendency. I know that when a wages board fixes a minimum wage that minimum wage becomes the maximum in the industry, and if an employer is paying more he at once comes back to that minimum, and it becomes the ruling wage. Just so will the maximum prices fixed by the board have a tendency to become the ruling prices. The Government are deserving of the severest censure for their want of wisdom—I put it as mildly as possible—in not seeing that the men they appointed to these boards were men about whom nothing could be said from the point of view of partiality, and for not seeing that they were men who would consider the interests of the buyers as well as the interests of the sellers. That is the issue that I have with the Government at the present time. The debate will possibly serve as some sort of guide to the boards for the future, but the greatest evil is that the boards are so constituted that they cannot possibly be fair.

Mr. FORSYTH (*Murrumbidgee*): The speech delivered by the hon. member who has just sat down is just like him—one of those violent speeches we expect to get from him in this House. He has stated that the wholesale houses will force the retail houses to charge the full prices fixed by the board. Well, I give the lie direct to that statement, because, in spite of all the hon. member has said, the board has already been round the wholesale houses getting their prices both before and since the war began, so that evidently they are doing their business. If the hon. member knew anything at all about wholesale business, he would know how little profit there is in connection with it. He also talked about self-raising flour. Why, you can buy half a dozen different brands of self-raising flour, all of them at different prices. As I said when the Bill was going through the House, you cannot say what the price of any article will be unless you know the brand and the quality. The question of the price of kerosene has also been referred to. Well, we know that kerosene is practically all supplied by one company, and they have raised the price since the war commenced. I could quote

twenty different lines in every-day use of which there are half a dozen different qualities, and it is absolutely useless arguing that the prices have been raised unless you say what brand you are referring to. If you state the brand, then there is something to go upon; but when you simply quote self-raising flour or pickles, unless you quote the particular brand, it is only a waste of breath. To say that the wholesale houses will force the retailers to sell at the prices fixed by the board is to make a statement that should be unworthy of any member of this House. I know what I am talking about, and the hon. member for Chillagoe does not. I have been a wholesale merchant for the last thirty years, and I say we have not raised our prices, and certain things we are selling for a good deal less to-day. We have been told that flour was raised £2 10s. per ton. That is so, but the wholesale houses forced the millers to reduce their price. And what has been the consequence? Why, at this very minute we have got orders in our books for hundreds of tons of flour from Sydney. We can get a better price for flour in Sydney than we can get here. What does the hon. member for Chillagoe think of that? We do not grow enough wheat in Queensland for our own consumption, but there is such a demand for flour in the South that they are actually trying to buy it here.

Mr. RYAN: Whom do you blame for putting up the price of flour to £12 10s.?

Mr. FORSYTH: You cannot blame the merchant.

Mr. RYAN: Whom do you blame?

Mr. FORSYTH: I suppose the miller is to blame; but I am prepared to sell flour for £10 10s. a ton to-day. I believe that every wholesale house is doing its best to down speculators and to keep their goods for their own customers, as we are doing. The prices fixed by the board are simply maximum prices. When the Bill was going through I said that it would act as a deterrent to prevent anyone trying to make money out of the difficulties we are in at the present time, and from that point of view it is a very good thing indeed. The leader of the Opposition talked about brisket of beef. Does the hon. member know anything at all about brisket of beef? Does he know that there are hundreds of tons here that are practically unsaleable at the present moment? In the last three days I have seen 100 tons of brisket of beef that the owners could not sell. Does the hon.

member know that? It is as good as any meat you can buy, and I should be very glad to use it myself. It is beautiful beef, and you can buy it for a mere pittance, for the simple reason that the people cannot export it, neither can the Commonwealth Government export it, and there are hundreds of tons lying here now. What we should do is to give that beef to the people now. Let the local butchers sell it, so that the people can have it at a low price.

Mr. FOLEY: Why don't the Government open a shop and sell it?

Mr. FORSYTH: The Government cannot do that unless they have power to sell it. If we could get the Commonwealth Government to allow them to sell it locally, it would be a good thing. Some of the hon. members opposite who are so fond of talking should go down to the meatworks around Brisbane

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and see the enormous quantity of brisket beef—hundreds of tons—which they cannot sell.

Mr. FIDELLY: Why don't the Commonwealth authorities offer to sell it?

Mr. FORSYTH: Because the Imperial Government will not have it. That is the beef which has nodules in it. We all know that it is just as good beef as any that you can get.

Mr. HARDACRE: There is no prohibition to selling it locally.

Mr. FORSYTH: If that is so, that is the beef the people should buy. The butchers should buy it and sell it cheaply to the people.

Mr. THEODORE: You would have to pay 4½d. a lb.

Mr. FORSYTH: You would not have to pay 4½d. a lb. I think you could buy 100 tons to-morrow at 2½d. a lb. I think I could guarantee to get 100 tons of that splendid beef at 2½d. a lb.

Mr. FIDELLY: You mean rejected beef.

Mr. FORSYTH: I mean rejected in this sense: that the Home Government will not take beef with nodules in it. As a matter of fact, cables have been sent to London to try and get the Imperial Government to allow that beef to be sent home for the troops. It is cheap and good.

Mr. FIDELLY: It is rejected by the veterinary surgeons.

Mr. FORSYTH: It is objected to because it has got nodules in it.

Mr. BOOKER: Prejudice!

Mr. FORSYTH: Yes, pure prejudice. As to the price of provisions, I could quote twenty different lines which have been raised lately. When a retailer or a wholesale merchant has to pay a higher price he cannot afford to sell at the old price, especially in the case of imported goods, and you cannot buy imported goods at the same price. Look at the price of cream of tartar! Before the war it was 10½d. or 11d. a lb.; to-day you can sell as much as ever you like at half-a-crown a lb. You cannot get it; there are only a few tons altogether, I believe, in Brisbane. The wholesalers tell me that every day there are men coming in offering them half-a-crown a lb. for cream of tartar, which, under ordinary conditions, would be selling at 10½d. or 11d. a lb. We ourselves could make a lot of money, but we are not doing it. We believe in the principle of not encouraging speculation, but simply supplying old customers and keeping our stock as long as we can. As to milk, you could buy 100 different brands of milk. Even before the war came into question at all you could get a quotation for lots of different brands from Victoria and from overseas, and all different prices. There is no use in quoting a thing unless you specify what the brand is; then you will have something to go on. If the board will try and fix the prices of goods so that they cannot exceed a certain amount, which, under ordinary conditions, would be a fair price, it will meet the case. I think myself that the Government are doing all that they can in this particular matter. There are at the present time fifteen or twenty boats on the way here with goods which we want. There is also a lot of stuff in Melbourne which we cannot get. On goods which were on the way here when war was declared merchants had to pay a war insurance of 10 per cent., and from that fact alone you cannot sell goods at the same price as they were before the war.

Mr. HUNTER: Did they not have to insure their goods before the war started?

Mr. FORSYTH: Yes; but that was only an ordinary insurance. It was not a war risk, but the moment the war started you had to pay the war risk. We had ourselves to pay very large amounts, and I know lots of merchants in Brisbane who, rather than run the risk of losing stock, paid an insurance of 10 per cent. on the value of their goods, so they cannot sell those goods at the same price as they did before the war. We know the insurance is reduced now. A little while ago it was reduced to 5 per cent., and I believe it is possible to insure as low as 2 or 3 per cent. How can we fix the price of goods arriving in Brisbane to-day owing to those conditions? Let me give an illustration. I know one house which paid a war risk of 10 per cent., while we, at the same time, through another company, were able to arrange for a war risk of 6 per cent. The freight and insurance must be added to the cost of the article. Rates vary from day to day, and so do freights. There is an enormous number of people out of work in Europe. We used to get a lot of products here from France, Germany, and Belgium, and that trade is stopped now. When you do get the stuff, you may have to pay a high insurance rate. I believe myself that the members of the board are perfectly honest and straightforward. What object can any of these men have to be biassed, as the deputy leader of the Opposition says? I am surprised at a man of the hon. member's intelligence raising such a question. I think the board is doing well. A great many of the articles manufactured in Australia have not been raised 1d., but there is an enormous amount of imported stuff—there are about £14,000,000 worth imported in a year—and it is the imported article which is rising in price, not so much the local. I think that so long as the people in Brisbane do not pay a higher price than the prices fixed by the board—and that is the maximum price to be charged for any quality—they have not a great deal to complain of.

An OPPOSITION MEMBER: If the retailers put the price up again, will the board have to sit again?

Mr. FORSYTH: Most decidedly. You will find that the board can raise the prices from time to time. Therefore, if the prices rise, they can raise the fixed prices: they can even deal with goods not mentioned in that list and fix the prices of those, if necessary. My impression is that we shall have to raise the prices of some of the goods to arrive, as their cost will be more than was paid for them previously. The board have to find out the cost of articles coming in, and then fix the prices at which they shall be sold, as men cannot be expected to sell under cost price. What we want is a fair deal in the matter, and I think the board will do well in that respect: the appointment of the board will prove a very strong deterrent against unduly high prices.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN (Barrack): I have listened somewhat attentively to the debate to find out what is the matter of "urgent public importance" that has given rise to this discussion on the motion for the adjournment of the House, and I confess that I have been unable to discover from the argument of the leader of the Opposition, or that of his deputy, the reason why the motion has been made. It seems to me that

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the matter has resolved itself into an academic debate regarding the personnel of boards appointed by the Government. Nothing has been advanced by members opposite to lead us to believe that a wrong has been done to the public by the appointments made by the Government, and certainly nothing has been brought forward to justify the allegations made by members that those gentlemen are unworthy of the confidence the Government has placed in them. But the discussion which has taken place has been valuable as showing the impracticability of one of the most important planks of the Labour platform, and that is, the fixing of prices by Parliament. Could anything be more lamentable than to have listened to the learned leader of the Opposition, with a price list in each hand, telling us how one storekeeper was attempting to rob the public, and how another storekeeper was giving the public a more honest deal? We are a legislative Chamber appointed for the purpose of governing and developing the country, and we are asked to stoop to the petty-fogging job of saying what shall be the price of sugar, or tea, or, perhaps, meat. It is one of the most startling and damatory commentaries that can be made on the policy of the Labour party, so far as it relates to the fixing of prices by Parliament. On the first occasion in the history of Queensland when an attempt is made under abnormal conditions which obtain throughout the world, to make a temporary use of one of their planks, it fails lamentably, and here we have the leader of the Opposition and his legion rushing into the Chamber immediately the first proclamation is issued and the first price-list is put before the public, condemning and censuring it for all they are worth. Why? Merely because they seem to differ from the Government as to the personnel of the board which has been appointed. Many of us recognise the great difficulty that beset this board when it was first appointed, and most of us recognise the fact, which is unconsciously or consciously lost sight of, that the function of the board was, not to determine the minimum prices of commodities, but to determine the maximum prices of commodities, and that is exactly what they have done. It does not necessarily follow that the maximum prices which they have fixed are going to be charged. Evidence has been brought forward by members opposite to show that the trading community of Queensland are sufficiently honest—in many instances at all events, and generally, I submit—not to take advantage of a crisis such as that through which we are passing at the present time to put up their prices. The leader of the Opposition was most unfortunate in the instances that he quoted. First of all he dealt with sugar. If there is one commodity in respect of which there would be some justification for raising the price at the present time, it is sugar. Yet, what do we find? That the particular corporation, the particular trust and combine at which members opposite have been complaining and campaigning continually, those people whom members opposite tell us are a predatory combination established for the purpose of sweating and squeezing the people of Australia, do not take advantage of the occasion. On the contrary, I find that the price of sugar is £1 per ton less than it was at the corresponding time last year. That is a fact which should be put against the statements made by hon. members oppo-

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site. The leader of the Opposition complained that the price of sugar to-day is quoted at £20 15s. per ton, and that the board have fixed the retail price at 2½d. per lb. Why, £20 15s. per ton is close on 2½d. per lb.; as a matter of fact, it is 2.19d. per lb., so that after all the margin is not very great.

Mr. RYAN: You are making a mistake.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: I am not making a mistake. I say that £20 15s. per ton is 2.19d. per lb.

Mr. RYAN: But they are selling it at 2.5d. per lb.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: I am aware of that. Do you expect people to retail it at the wholesale price?

Mr. RYAN: Your reckoning must be wrong.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: No, it is perfectly right.

Mr. RYAN: Why, the maximum price fixed by the board is only 2.75d. per lb., and you say the wholesale price is 2.9d. per lb.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: I am not giving the actual cost; I am dealing with the wholesale price.

Mr. RYAN: How can the wholesale price be 2.9d. per lb., when the maximum selling price fixed by the board is 2.75d. per lb.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: Well, leaving that for a moment, we come to the fact that, at all events, the wholesale price of sugar, £20 15s. per ton, has not been raised one single farthing, which, after all, is the most important point I wanted to make—that notwithstanding the conditions obtaining at the present time, when there might have been some justification for the price of this commodity being raised, the very opposite is the case. But what do we find with regard to that commodity in other parts? I have here evidence that the price stated by the board is by no means abnormal. Take, for instance, Roma. I see my friend, the hon. member for Maranoa, who will, no doubt, bear me out when I say that the price of sugar in Roma is 3½d. per lb.

Mr. HUNTER: I know nothing of the sort.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: Well, I am telling him that that is the price. And here complaint has been made by the hon. the leader of the Opposition merely because provision has been made, not that the price insisted upon is to be 2½d., but that the price should not exceed 2½d.—a miserable complaint is made, merely because you can purchase it in some instances for a farthing a lb. less. Now, when anybody comes into this House and deals with a certain commodity, I think he should, at any rate, make himself conversant with it.

Mr. FOLEY: You are protecting your friends, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: The Colonial Sugar Refining Company are able to look after themselves, and they have not in any case increased the price of sugar. As a matter of fact, they have reduced the price.

Mr. HUNTER: They reduced it before the war.

Hon. R. PHILLIPS: They have not increased the price since the war.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: I say that the price of sugar is lower per ton to-day than it was at this time twelve months ago. That is irrefutable. I have the figures in front

of me. I want to point out further that in this connection the leader of the Opposition complained about the two prices, but he did not say anything about the quality of the commodity. Now, there is just as much difference in sugar as in any other article of ordinary consumption, and whilst he quoted 2½d., was that for fine granulated sugar, for instance, or for 1B crystals?

Mr. BERTRAM: They are all the same price.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: What nonsense! I have here the price list in front of me.

Mr. LENNON: He was referring to 1A.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: He did not say what he was referring to.

Mr. RYAN: I did.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: I am merely pointing out that there is a difference of £3 10s. between the price of the best sugar and of the lowest-priced sugar. And hon. members will, no doubt, admit that that makes a very considerable difference in selling it to the consumer. But leaving that for a moment, we come to this fact—that if there is a tendency on the part of some tradespeople to get behind the community, what a splendid opportunity it is for our co-operative people? We are constantly hearing hon. members opposite declaring the benefits of co-operation.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: You believe in co-operation.

Lieut.-Colonel RANKIN: I do believe in co-operation. But here is your opportunity. I believe that a step has been taken in which some members are interested, and surely here is the opportunity to overcome any disabilities that may be placed on them because of the operations of this board. Because it cannot be shown that the wholesale man is doing an injustice to the retailer. If anything wrong is being done, it is being done by the retailer himself. If any argument has been adduced by members on the other side either as to the personal qualifications of the members of the board, or as to the particular items quoted by the leader of the Opposition, then they have failed most lamentably in showing that there is any reason for censure or condemnation. So far as one article that was mentioned is concerned—self-raising flour—it has been shown that the rise in price is caused by the large increase in price of one of the ingredients. The arguments as to meat were sufficiently combated by the statements made by the hon. member for Murrumbidgee a few minutes ago, and right along the line, while they tried, under cover of those men, to place the Government in an unfavourable light in the eyes of the public, I submit that the members opposite have lamentably failed, because they have certainly not disclosed either any lack of intelligence or knowledge on the part of any of the appointees of the Government. Some reference was made by one hon. member to the character of the board. I am not aware that there has been any substantiation of the remarks made in that regard. So far as I have been able to obtain any information, the character of the members is absolutely above reproach, and I feel quite sure that if there is nothing more to condemn than the few paltry instances mentioned by the leader of the Opposition, his motion certainly does not justify the adjournment of the House, because there is nothing in the nature of a public grievance worthy of the

name which calls for such drastic action as suggested by its terms.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER (*Margborough*): We all in this House, when the question of regulating these prices was under discussion, considered it was a splendid move in the interests of the community, and I am sure that no one has altered his views between that time and now. But I think that the way in which the hon. and learned leader of the Opposition introduced this motion is absolutely unfair, and adopted with the object of misleading the people, or else it has been done out of ignorance—because he knows nothing about the matter he is discussing. He says that a certain price has been fixed by the board. Can he say that because that maximum price has been fixed it has caused any of the retailers in this town or in Queensland to raise the prices? It will not have the slightest effect on their raising their prices. They will still go on charging what they have considered in the past to be a legitimate price, and, in many cases, under the prices fixed. We find that members on the other side are in favour of the retailer who is in a large way, which they always term "the boddler," and they do not wish to assist the small retailer. The very statement made by the leader of the Opposition shows that their sympathies are not with them.

Mr. HUNTER: That is, in your mind.

Mr. E. B. C. CORSER: In anybody's mind who can go and work it out. I will show you why. He takes the price list in his hand of large retail cash buyers and cash sellers and he compares that price with the price of the small retail man. The retail man is generally not a cash buyer, nor is he a cash seller, and he must naturally have a bigger margin. There is another thing which makes it difficult for any commission

to fix prices on the basis of [5 p.m.] what goods are sold at by a certain section of the community.

The large and wealthy retailer and often the retailers in this city buy very largely twelve months ahead and often buy their stocks very cheaply indeed. Some of the retailers are large importers—very nearly if not quite as large as the wholesale merchants—and they turn over a very large quantity of goods in the twelve months. They take no risks; their turnover is enormous and their expenses are much lower in comparison to those of the small retailer, and the small man cannot possibly sell against them. Where the small retailer comes in is that he is more convenient to the people who want the goods and consequently people do not run into the cities and buy their goods at the cash stores but buy them outside at a higher price. If it was made imperative that these men who buy on terms and sell on terms should sell at the prices the leader of the Opposition quoted from the cash stores, it would kill them financially. They would not be in existence long and the people whom they are supplying, and many who get out of employment through no fault of their own, would not be able to get supplies, and consequently we would have—what I stated when this question was before the House a fortnight ago—we should have a disaster which this Act never contemplated would arise. It was passed to relieve the needy and not to try and impose extra burdens on them. Very unkind accusations have been

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made as to what the wholesale merchants will do. As a wholesaler of many years' standing I can tell you that not one single bit of notice will be taken of the prices that have been issued as the maximum prices of the retailers. A merchant does not carry on his business in that way. He buys as cheaply as he can and he sells as cheaply as he can providing he makes a fair profit for himself, and the wholesale man who can sell the cheapest and best goods is the man who commands an increased volume of trade. There is no combination to fix food prices. Take my own district: There is no combination as to prices of foodstuffs, we all sell at what we like to ask, and we know that those who buy from us are the best judges as to where to go for goods. There must be a maximum price so as to meet the case of the small retailer, and the making of that maximum price means helping the man who has to buy on terms—helping him to keep a poor man when he is out of employment. Now as to the very great difference in the prices: When one takes into consideration the loss that a man who does not buy for cash sustains, the risk that he takes by supplying on terms, the difference between what he and the large retail cash buyer and cash seller makes is not very great. I am sure that a large retailer who buys and sells for cash makes, at the lower prices quoted, a vast deal more money than the small retailer can make at higher prices, because the volume of business is so much greater and the risks in the one case are practically nil. It is not right for any member of this House to make accusations like those that have fallen from the lips of members on the other side about a business in which they have never had any interest at all and about which they know nothing at all, simply because one who does know happens to interject, as I did when the leader of the Opposition was speaking. I asked him a civil question and a very fair one. When he said there was a difference of 12½ per cent. between certain prices, I asked him how much of that went in working expenses. He could not tell. I know he could not tell, as he was dealing with a matter of which he has no knowledge whatever, and it was just as stupid for him to criticise these matters, about which he knows nothing at all, as it would be for me to criticise his law. The hon. member has no more, and perhaps not as much knowledge of mercantile transactions as I have of law, and I would not attempt to criticise his law nor would I impute wrong motives to him in any question of his profession. It is deplorable to hear statements made from the other side containing innuendoes or insinuating that men stand up in this House or interject with a view of trying to benefit themselves at the expense of somebody else. The wholesale people in Queensland in every direction are trying to help suffering humanity on the other side of the world and to assist as much as they possibly can to give employment, and also to keep down prices. I should like the hon. member to have been, not only in my office, but in other offices of wholesale men during the last month or so, and he would have seen for himself the number of refusals of orders from good people simply because we know they were trying to get those goods for the purpose of speculation. As I said a fortnight ago, I have turned down many new accounts that have been offered because we were opening

no new accounts. We are going to keep all our old customers and are going to restrict them as near as possible to what they have been getting from us during the past few months and that enables them to restrict the retail buyers who want to lay in five or six months' supply, and they are the people who have been trying to raise the prices of commodities on the rest of the community. The wholesale people have been trying all they possibly can to keep them from speculating so as to keep the stock that is in Australia for the purpose of dealing it out to those who really want it.

Mr. BOOKER (*Wide Bay*): When the two Acts that this discussion bears on were being discussed, members on both sides of the House took up an even attitude, and at that time the question of the personnel of the boards was the supreme issue. I cannot conceive of a more ungenerous attack upon the Administration who are responsible for the appointments and upon the men who constitute the boards, and more particularly the board for the Southern Division. I would like to know from the deputy leader of the Opposition what position Mr. Cheeseman occupies? As the Premier indicated, when he was speaking on this question a few days ago, he had some difficulty in choosing men who had some knowledge of the meat trade, and, after a considerable amount of inquiry and consideration, Mr. Cheeseman was chosen. From one point of view it was very wise to choose a man who in no sense was identified with a producer or a trader. He is a public servant filling a responsible position. I cannot conceive that Mr. Cheeseman could in any way favour the butchers who are supplying the people with meat. To me it is most ungenerous on the part of the deputy leader of the Opposition to make remarks about a public servant in that way. As I have said, Mr. Cheeseman is a public servant, and has no right of reply. So far as the fixing of the price of meat is concerned, the question was raised indicating the difference in the price of meat supplied by the Redbank Meat Company and that supplied by the local trade. Anyone who knows anything about the operations of the various meat companies and those of the town trader must understand that the meat companies buy their stock several months ahead, and they buy them in large numbers. Some of the local butchers buy almost as far ahead as the meat companies, such as men like Baynes Brothers and others. Nevertheless, the majority of the trade buy their requirements from week to week. They buy in small quantities, and they buy under the closest competition in the open market. The large meat companies go to the pastoralists and arrange for the supply of large numbers of stock at a fixed price, and the price is not so keen as that reached in the competition at Eborgera. It is not fair to say that the local butcher is robbing the public to the extent of the difference in the prices quoted by the leader of the Opposition as representing the prices of the Redbank Meat Company and those of the local butcher. This brings me to a suggestion. Instead of the deputy leader of the Opposition wasting a lot of energy and being about as unjust as a public man can be, if he were to use his energy and his well-known organising ability in organising the trading centres throughout Brisbane, and if the Labour party as the representatives of the great unions of Queensland, which command a large sum of money to-day, would join with him there would be more business in it.

[Mr. E. B. C. Corser.

They would be much more patriotic, as the masters of the unions, if they used whatever capital was necessary out of the unions to buy up all the butchering centres or establish new butchers' shops throughout the city, and then buy meat direct from the meat companies; or, if necessary, go out into the country and buy the stock from the pastoralists, and then sell the meat at a cheap rate to the people. It would be a good business proposition, perhaps, if they bought all their meat from the Redbank Meat Company. They could buy it at the cheap price quoted by the leader of the Opposition, and then it could be retailed out to the public at the lowest price possible. That would do two things. It would, in a logical way, give the people the opportunity of buying meat at the lowest possible price, because the unions would be managing it. Take Mr. Gilday, the hon. member for Ithaca, as the general manager of the butchers' shops in Brisbane, and take the hon. member for Herbert, Mr. Lennon, as the general manager of the grocers' shops. The hon. member for Herbert was once chairman of a co-operative grocery business. I ask the hon. gentleman was he able at the time when he was managing director of that company to sell things at a profit less than Parry and Roberts and other companies here running that particular business? Coming back to the supply of meat, Mr. Gilday has organised the butchering trade to a remarkable degree, and has brought about the closest combine in the industrial ranks, and it would be better for him to take up the general management of these various meat shops throughout the city. Knowing the trade as he does from A to Z, he could select the best men for the work. What a fine object-lesson it would be if Mr. Gilday and the masters of the unions in this House carried out what I suggest. They could use the necessary capital to start the butchers' shops, and they could get their meat in the cheapest possible way, whether from the stockowners or the meat companies, and sell it without any intention of making profit otherwise than paying expenses. There would be much more business in that and there would be a kindlier spirit, too. That would be doing in a practical way—not in the eloquent way that the deputy leader of the Opposition does it, not in that kind of spirit—but in the true spirit of giving the people cheap meat and the best of it. There is more business in that, and I hope that hon. members will seriously take that view of it, and have these meat shops established throughout the city and suburbs. They could also arrange with the hon. member for Herbert not to worry himself about politics for the term of the war, but to go out and be general manager of the grocery business throughout the city. (Hear, hear!) They have the money there to do it. Why do they not do it? Their duty does not seem to be to give practical help to the people, but to fool them. That just reminds me that the matter we have had to-day from hon. members opposite, particularly from the deputy leader of the Opposition, we have had throughout the country for a long time, and the result we are quite aware of. It is by that kind of stuff that the party opposite has gained a majority. (Opposition laughter.) Yes, that is the way they have gained it, by filling the minds of the people with the idea that the Liberals are the men who are the blood-sucking community while they are the

saviours of the people. I am offering them some sound business way of proving how anxious they are to show how to conduct the business of the country better than the business men on this side of the House. We are going to have this kind of stuff for hours. Probably from time to time we will have further amendments of certain matters. We will have requests to have certain things discussed. For what purpose will they be discussed? Not to give the people cheap food, but to talk to the crowds outside who are prejudiced, and to some extent passionately prejudiced, against their best friends. We will have more of the stuff we have had this afternoon. For what purpose? Not to give the people cheap food, but to get it into their ears for the next election. That is the view I take of it. I cannot help regretting the speech of the deputy leader of the Opposition. The leader of the Opposition dealt with the question from his point of view admirably well and dispassionately, but as regards the speech of his deputy, it would be well for the best interests of the House and the best interests of the country if he had not spoken, because there was nothing in his remarks that will make any article of consumption consumed by the workers of Queensland one fraction cheaper. The hon. gentleman made some reply to an interjection of mine by saying that I said there was no value in by-products. I have never discussed that question at all in the House, because I have a different view altogether. I am quite satisfied from the news we received to-day from the seat of war that matters will be very much better in the near future. (Hear, hear!) I am quite satisfied that the value of the by-products of our sheep and cattle will probably be higher within the next three months, probably within the next thirty days, than we have seen them for a very long time. (Hear, hear!) Take the enormous waste of woollens; take the enormous waste of leather in the war. In the United States they are fully equipped for dealing with our raw products—our hides and our wool. The ports of Russia will soon be open to take our tallow. All that indicates that our by-products will be more valuable in the immediate future than they have been at least in the immediate past. When the markets are open for our hides, our tallow, and our wool, beef is not likely to increase in price. The extra prices of the last week or two were altogether due to the inability of the butchers to realise on their by-products, which at the very least have been worth £3 a head on an 800-lb. bullock. To show that matters in this direction are becoming settled, I read in this afternoon's "Telegraph" that wool sales in London have been arranged to be held on the 6th October. I just quote that concrete case to bear out my previous contention that, so far as meat is concerned, for some time there will be no great advance in prices. I hope, although I am a producer of stock, that the price of meat will not rise any higher than at present. I said when the Imperial Meat Bill was going through that stockowners of Australia, big and little, would have been quite satisfied to supply their stock at the prices ruling prior to the outbreak of war. In discussing matters of this kind, where it is so easy to arouse the prejudices of the people, we should be very guarded with respect to making statements such as we listened to from the deputy leader of the Opposition. The first instinct of

Mr. Booker.]

human nature is self-preservation, and to get the necessities of life is the first consideration of everyone. I can quite understand the feelings of a woman with a limited income when she has to pay the prices she has to pay now for the necessities of life, and everyone of us, whether on this side or on that side, should be very guarded in reflecting upon anyone who is bearing his part in supplying the people with the necessities of life. I am a producer, and I am doing my part. The traders on this side are doing the same. On that side the hon. member for Maranoa, I am quite satisfied, is just as anxious to act his part—and I am sure he is doing so—as any trader who sits on this side. At this particular time there should be no distinctions whatever. Each and every one of us, I am sure, is anxious to do the right thing, and no hon. member should suggest that the trading community are not doing the right thing. I am sure they are, and probably the hon. member for Chillagoe, with his usual sardonic attitude, feels just as I do, but it does not suit his book to say so.

Mr. FOLEY (*Mundingburr*): I am going to support this motion, and the reason why I support it is because I do not think the Government have acted quite fairly in selecting the boards to consider the questions that have been remitted to them by the Act. I asked the Premier to-day what were the names of the members of the Northern board and what were their qualifications for the position. The reply the hon. gentleman made to me was that I would find the names in the "Gazette," and in answer to the second part of the question, he said that they were appointed because they understood the business, or knew the values of goods. With reference to the latter part of the answer, two of the three gentlemen who have been appointed have never had any experience in the value of goods such as were to be submitted to them by the Act. Mr. Swales is the mayor of Townsville. He is an engineer by trade, and, while he may know the cost of repairing an engine or of putting a patch on a boiler, or something of that sort, in my opinion he knows absolutely nothing about the prices of foodstuffs. In the second place, Mr. Parkes is a land, house, and commission agent, and, to my knowledge, has never had any dealings in the price of foodstuffs, because I have known him for nearly thirty-two years, and he has always been in the same kind of business. The third member of the board—Mr. Thorpe—is a commission agent—a man who deals in foodstuffs. He is Townsville agent for J. C. Hutton's hams and bacon, and for several flour merchants. I give him credit for knowing something about the business; but, at the same time, he is secretary to the Merchants' Association and to the Master Butchers' Association of Townsville, and a man holding those positions cannot reasonably be expected to fix prices for foodstuffs that would meet the requirements of the working classes, and for that reason I strongly protest against the appointment of this gentleman. The Premier had certain names supplied to him from Townsville, but, as he did not know the gentlemen, he asked members from the North, if they knew of suitable persons up there, to submit their names to him, and I took it upon myself, when the House closed on the evening we passed the Bill, to see the hon. gentleman and ascertain if he had a certain name among the six names supplied to him.

[*Mr. Booker.*

He answered in the negative, and then I told him about a certain gentleman in Townsville who had had great experience in the prices of foodstuffs such as would be submitted to the board. The man I referred to had twenty-one years' experience in the grocery trade, and for eleven years was the manager of a grocery business in Townsville. He has retired from business, and I recommended him to the Premier. Before doing so I wired to the gentleman himself to know if he would accept the position if he was appointed. The Premier asked me to write him the next day recommending the man, which I did. I felt certain that, if anybody was wanted who knew the actual prices of goods such as those to be submitted to the board, this man ought to be the one man who would be appointed. He would be disinterested, because he is not connected with any merchant or anything of that sort.

Mr. KESSELL: What were his politics.

Mr. FOLEY: I don't know his politics.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Oh! and laughter.

Mr. FOLEY: My own opinion is that, whatever his politics may be, his personal experience in these matters should fit him for the position. We have often heard the other side complain about the Federal Labour Government's policy of [5.30 p.m.] preference to unionists, but if ever there was a case of preference to Liberals, this is as plain a case as I have ever seen. I hear that the secretary of the Waterside Union in Townsville was one of the six whose names were submitted to the Premier. It is well known what his politics are, and while he may be supposed to know as much about the price of foodstuffs as the first two gentlemen I have named, yet his name was evidently turned down by the Premier because of his politics. I feel that, because with regard to the other gentlemen I have named, while they are members of the Chamber of Commerce in Townsville, it cannot be said that any of them has ever had any experience in fixing the price of foodstuffs. I have known both gentlemen for many years, and know that they have not had any experience in these matters.

Mr. MORGAN: Why was the man you recommended turned down?

Mr. FOLEY: I do not know, unless it is that he knew too much about these things. I could have named a score of men who would have been quite as competent to carry out these duties as either of the gentlemen who have been appointed, but the fact that I could not vouch that they had had experience in these matters was my reason for not naming any of them. I knew this man to be out of business, and to have had twenty-one years' experience as a grocer, and as a manager of a large grocery business, and I thought he would have been eminently suited for the position. Yet I find that his name was left off the board.

Mr. KESSELL: You admit that the three men are competent?

Mr. FOLEY: I do not admit it. The three men who have been appointed are, in my opinion, not competent, because they have not had any experience in these matters. I have nothing to say against them either in their private capacity or as public men, but I say that two of them, at least, are not competent to hold positions on the board. I enter my strong protest as a citizen of Townsville, and as a member for

North Queensland against the appointments which have been made. The Government have shown great partiality in the appointments. Although the Premier says that the gentlemen appointed possess the qualifications, I do not think that they do, and it cannot be said that they have had any experience to qualify them for the position. I am glad that the leader of the Opposition has moved the adjournment of the House, which has given me an opportunity of placing my protest before the Chamber. I had a wire from Townsville, immediately the appointments were made, protesting against the appointment of Mr. Thorpe—I will not say because he did not know the value of things, but because he is the secretary of the Merchants' Association and secretary of the Master Butchers' Association, and that on those grounds he is disqualified from holding the position. It has been said that this board is only appointed to consider the retail prices, but we know that the retail prices are governed by what the retailers can purchase at from the wholesale merchants. If the wholesale merchants buy at a price that will make it impossible for the retailer to sell at the price fixed by the board, what is he going to do? There is nothing to say that this board has power to fix the prices to be charged by the wholesale merchant. He can fix what price he likes, and if the retailer cannot fix his price accordingly and then sell his goods at a profit, what will be the result? The board should have power not only to fix the price to be charged by the retailer, but also by the wholesale merchant.

Mr. MORGAN: It has got that power.

Mr. FOLEY: They have not. Hon. members opposite who have spoken have affirmed that it is only the retail price that the board has power to fix. I have here a copy of the "Daily Standard" newspaper, giving the prices fixed by the board in Brisbane, and prices have been raised on seven or eight commodities that are of every-day use, such as rice, three-crown currants, three-crown sultanas, self-raising flour, kerosene, milk, and oatmeal. The profits to the retailer on those articles has been raised in some cases from 36.7 per cent. to 45.5 per cent.

Mr. KESSELL: What is the wholesale price?

Mr. FOLEY: I cannot read the whole of this list; I will lend it to the hon. member to read for himself.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member for Mundingsburra is just as much out of order in answering interjections as the hon. member for Port Curtis is in making interjections. (Hear, hear!)

Mr. FOLEY: I think there is sufficient evidence in that article in the "Daily Standard" to warrant us in raising our objection, and pointing out that the board is not acting in the interests of the consumers, whom we are here to protect. I am pleased to have had the opportunity of pointing out that as far as the Northern Board is concerned I do not know what prices they have fixed yet, but I am satisfied that the members of the board are not competent, because they do not know what the prices should be, and will simply be guided by what they are

told by the merchants and wholesale dealers. For that reason, I say that the board as constituted is not a proper board to fix the prices of foodstuffs in the Northern district.

Mr. GILDAY (*Ithaca*): I think that members on this side would be lacking in their duty if they did not make a protest at this particular juncture. On the 3rd August war was declared, and on the 5th August a large number of commodities went up by 15 per cent. During last week the board which has been appointed has fixed a maximum price, which ranges from anything from 5 to 50 per cent. more than the normal price. The members of the board are not acting up to what we expected them to do when we passed the Bill in this House. We hear the hon. member for Maryborough—and it is only natural seeing that he is an interested party—say that he is going to take up the battle on behalf of the board. I am not going to say that the board are not trying to do their best, but I am of opinion that the board are not capable of dealing with the question. They do not seem to go about in the right way to get the necessary evidence in order to enable them to formulate fair prices to be charged to the people. I have risen to say a few words about the meat industry, and I think the figures which I have here will justify me in saying that so far as the price of meat is concerned it is considerably higher now than what it should be. This is a question which I have seriously considered during the last three or four weeks. I made it my business to find out the price of cattle, and also the price charged to the consumer, and I have come to the conclusion that meat is to-day sold in Brisbane at a considerably higher price than it should be. I have a few figures here showing the prices charged for meat on the 8th September, 1912, and the total increase on a 600-lb. body of beef producing 414 lb. of meat, as compared with the total at prices charged at the present time. The following table shows the prices paid for the several joints of beef from a beast producing 414 lb. of meat:—

Lb.	Joint.	Prices in 1912.		Prices in 1914.		Increase.	
		d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.
24	Rump	13	0	19	0	6	0
6	Fillet	3	0	6	0	3	0
80	Shoulder	3	0	6	0	3	0
35	Petite Rib	3	0	6	0	3	0
40	Chuck	3	0	6	0	3	0
40	Brisket	3	0	6	0	3	0
35	Silverside	3	0	6	0	3	0
30	Topside	3	0	6	0	3	0
21	Thick Flank	3	0	6	0	3	0
41	Blade	3	0	6	0	3	0
30	Chuck	3	0	6	0	3	0
20	Neck	3	0	6	0	3	0
6	Suet	3	0	6	0	3	0
	Total 414	13	0	19	0	6	0

The HOME SECRETARY: What about the prices of cattle?

Mr. Gilday.]

Mr. GILDAY: I am only giving those prices at present. Everything else has gone up in proportion. Two years ago an ox tongue was 2s. 6d.; now the price is 5d. per lb., which means an increase of 1s. on a tongue. It is interesting in this connection to note that the prices charged by the Redbank Meat Company for a body of meat weighing 630 lb. and cutting out 414 lb., come to £3 13s. less than those charged by the retail butchers in Brisbane. The following table shows how this total is made up:—

Lb.	Joint.	Brisbane Butchers' Prices.	Redbank Meat Co.'s Prices.			Less.
			d.	s.	d.	
24	Rump	9	6	13	0	2
6	Fillet	11	7	3	0	5
80	Sirloin	6½	4	9	1	9
35	Prime Rib	6	4	8	0	5
40	Chuck Rib	5	8	10	6	10
40	Br Sket	6	8	4	7	7
35	Br Sket	7	10	0	10	0
33	Tripside	6½	8	9	0	8
24	Tripside	6	10	3	6	3
24	Thick Flank	6½	10	0	0	0
44	Blade	6½	9	0	2	3
30	Chuck	6½	10	0	0	6
20	Neck	4	4	1	8	0
6	Steak ..	7	5	0	1	0
Total 414			Total			£3 13 0

I may point out that some of the local butchers go out to the market and purchase their cattle in the same way as the Redbank Meat Company do. It is, in my opinion, a scandalous shame that the Control of Prices Board do not adopt a better method of dealing with the meat question than they do. Any conscientious person reading the evidence submitted to the board on this question must come to the conclusion that they can never arrive at finality on that evidence as to what is a fair and legitimate charge to the consumer. I notice that they have called some master butchers to give evidence, and have practically put answers into their mouths, instead of asking them to submit receipts for purchases of cattle and statements showing the amount they pay in wages. It is a shame that the board should stoop to such a method of obtaining evidence with the view of trying to make the people believe that they are doing the right thing. I say that the board are not doing their duty, and that they do not know the proper way to go about getting at the basis of the charges for meat. As a man who thoroughly understands the meat industry, I say here that the retail prices charged for meat for many months past have been considerably higher than they should have been. Some reference has been made to the prices at the various meatworks. I think the time has arrived when they should be able to send their meat to other parts of the world without having to take so much off as they have at the present time, owing

[Mr. Gilday.

to the restrictions imposed on the other side of the world. There is no justification for those restrictions, as some of the best medical evidence obtainable has shown that the non-exportable parts are not injurious to health. If those parts could be exported, that would have a tendency to minimise the cost of meat, particularly at the meatworks. I believe that if the Redbank Company were allowed to export the enormous quantity of brisket that they have now to throw aside, they would be able to retail meat much cheaper than they are doing at the present time.

Mr. KESSELL: You will admit that that is a loss.

Mr. GILDAY: I admit that it is a loss to the meatworks, and I am not saying that the meatworks are raising the price of meat. As a matter of fact, the Redbank Company are selling meat for considerably less than retail butchers in Brisbane are doing, though they have to discard the portions of meat I have referred to. I want to repeat that I think it would be a good thing for Queensland, and particularly for the meat industry, if the authorities took off that embargo which exists on beef at the present time, so far as brisket is concerned.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: What about the by-products?

Mr. GILDAY: I have no desire to go into this question further at the present time, but I will conclude by answering the hon. member for Warwick. I had in my mind some three or four weeks ago the idea that there was something in the arguments put up in regard to them. Now, I am in a position to say that a fair price has been offered to butchers by certain buyers for their by-products, but they wanted to hold out for prices that existed when things were normal. At that time, hides and tallow and other by-products were at the highest price known in Queensland. There is not the slightest doubt about that. A challenge was inserted in one of the papers challenging the butchers to refute the statement that they had been offered a certain price for their by-products, and one paper was given permission to make the statement by several people who were willing and anxious to buy the by-products, although at a less price than prevailed before the war. To-day there will be one of the largest tanneries working that have ever been operating in Queensland. Fellmongery is going on just as fast as ever, and they are asking for men, and there is practically no foundation for saying that there are no buyers for by-products.

Hon. R. PHILP: Did not Baynes Bros. close down last week?

Mr. GILDAY: If they did, the whole of the men can get work to-morrow at wool-scouring.

Hon. R. PHILP: Do you not know that they did close down?

Mr. GILDAY: I did not know. If so, the men engaged at the Belmont woolscour can get work to-morrow morning, because seventy or eighty men are wanted for wool-scouring and fellmongery.

Hon. R. PHILP: Where?

Mr. GILDAY: Cannon Hill.

Mr. GUNN: The meat trust. (Laughter.)

Mr. GILDAY: I am telling you where it is—at Cannon Hill. As to the statement regarding by-products, the increase in the price of beef is £3 13s. 10d., and I do not suppose the by-products in a 600-lb. bullock would be worth more than £2 2s. 10d.

Mr. BRIDGES: Can you tell us how much the price of a bullock has risen in the last two years.

Mr. GILDAY: Yes; I can. I just rose to refute the arguments which have been advanced, and I am satisfied that nobody can refute my statements.

Mr. MORGAN (*Murilla*): The hon. member who has just resumed his seat has made out a good argument why butchers should have raised their prices, and if he will follow me for a moment and check my figures, we will find out exactly how things have gone. He said that a 600-lb. bullock would give a butcher a difference in profit of £3 13s. 10d. between 1912, two years ago, and now. Two years ago a butcher was paying £1 a 100 lb. for his beef; to-day he is paying £1 10s., so that—and I do not think any member can refute it—the difference is £3 on a 600-lb. bullock. So the butcher is giving £3 more for his beef, and he is getting £3 13s. 10d. That leaves him with an extra profit of 13s. 10d. Now, is the butcher losing more than 13s. 10d. in regard to by-products when compared with two years ago?

Mr. GILDAY: Two years ago they were at £1 5s. a 100 lb.

Mr. MORGAN: I think the statement is borne out by the hon. member for Townsville and other hon. members, that two years ago you could buy them in the yards or elsewhere for £1 a 100 lb. That leaves the butcher with 13s. 10d. more than two years ago, but I do not think that any hon. member can show that the price for by-products to-day is within 13s. 10d. of what it was two years ago in a 600-lb. bullock. So that whilst the butcher is getting 13s. 10d. more for his beef, he is losing more than £1 for his by-products, or a loss of 6s. 8d. on a 600-lb. bullock. And I think the hon. member will agree with me when I say that wages are not less to-day. Probably, the expense is greater to-day of running a butcher's shop than it was two years ago. So that the figures quoted by the hon. member, instead of doing his argument good, instead of showing that the butchers are making more profit, go to show to any right-thinking man who will go into them, that he is doing a fair thing so far as the price he is paying for his beef will allow him.

Mr. HUXHAM: Were they making a fortune two years ago?

Mr. MORGAN: I do not say that they did not make money. I think they did. I think all business people are making money, but the hon. member wanted to show that the butchers were making more to-day than they were making two years ago, whereas it could easily be shown that they are not making so large a profit. I am sorry that this motion has been moved by the leader of the Opposition at a time when a great number of employers are keeping on men whom they could do without.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: Some are sacking them.

Mr. MORGAN: I ask the hon. member to point out employers who are sacking men. I know of men who are keeping on hands

when they can do without them. I know that is being done in the country. I myself have let a contract to scrub-fall 200 acres, when I did not really want it done, but I desired to give the men work at this particular time. There are others doing the same to-day, and I tell the leader of the Opposition and his party that this is not the time to put class against class. (Hear, hear!) We want to try to work together, but if you do try to set one class against the other, I know which section is likely to come out on top. Hon. members opposite are supposed to be doing their best by the working classes, but by bringing up matters of this kind, and trying to gain political kudos, as the leader of the Opposition is always trying to do in this House, they are not doing that. I am sorry that he has brought up this particular question. It appears to me, after listening very carefully to the speeches delivered by the

leader and deputy leader of the [7 p.m.] Opposition, that this motion has been moved for a special purpose—not because the prices fixed by the board are outrageous or wrong, but simply to give the leader of the Opposition and his party an opportunity of attacking the personnel of the board because he had not been taken into the confidence of the Premier when making those appointments. Had there been one or two members of the Trades Hall or some political workers' representative on the board, this motion would not have been moved, as the leader of the Opposition would have been perfectly satisfied with the prices fixed by the board. Owing to the fact that the hon. member was not given an opportunity of naming at least one member on each board, he has thought it a fair opportunity to criticise and practically insult the members of the boards. At a time of this sort we want to cause as little disturbance as possible. I intend to quote figures to show that the retailers, or what may be termed middlemen, who occupy positions on the Opposition benches must feel in a very humiliating position when they listen to the criticisms directed by other members of the party against the middlemen or retail grocers on this side. We notice that on most occasions the hon. member for Maranoa, and one or two other middlemen on that side, generally have a lot to say, but when a question of this sort is being discussed they remain very silent. It would be very amusing to hear the hon. member for Maranoa on the prices fixed by this particular board.

The SPEAKER: Order! I suggest to the hon. member that it is not parliamentary to debate the private positions of hon. members in the House. It is a very questionable practice, and one that I do not think is in very good taste.

Mr. MORGAN: I want to say that while hon. members opposite always endeavour to make all the political capital they can in regard to members on this side, we have to sit silent and take their criticism for what it is worth. Nevertheless, it must be very humiliating for members on that side who are engaged in similar industries. Certain figures have been quoted in the labour daily in connection with prices, and I notice that those prices in almost every instance refer to articles not manufactured in Queensland.

Mr. LENNON: Quite the opposite. Nearly all are raised here.

Mr. Morgan.]

Mr. MORGAN: Is barley or rice manufactured here?

Mr. LENNON: What about oatmeal?

Mr. MORGAN: How much oatmeal is manufactured here? The hon. member knows that there is not a very great deal of oatmeal manufactured in Queensland. Then, there are currants, sultanas, and even flour. Members opposite know perfectly well that it is necessary for us to get nearly two-thirds of our flour from the other States, and they know very well that freights have gone up, and the little increase that the board has fixed on these articles no doubt counteracts the increased cost of delivering the goods in Queensland. We find that the ordinary retail price of sugar in Brisbane is 2½d. per lb., and we want to show that this board did not deal with Brisbane only. We want to show the different prices that are charged in some of the country towns, and also to show the House the profits that are made in some localities over and above those supposed enormous profits made in Brisbane. In connection with sugar, we find that in Roma, on the 22nd July, sugar was being sold retail at 3½d. per lb. The cost of sugar at that time, as given by the "Sugar Journal," was £20 15s. per ton. The cost of carriage to Roma is £4 10s. per ton, making the cost of sugar landed at Roma £25 5s. per ton. At 3½d. per lb., a ton of sugar would be equal to £32 13s. 4d., so that the storekeeper in Roma was making a profit of no less than £7 8s. per ton, equal to over 20 per cent. Now, we are told by the Labour daily that such a profit is nothing more or less than robbery—that the people who buy from the storekeeper at that price are being robbed. Who are robbing the people? Is it all being done by one particular section? Are there not good socialists conducting stores? Can the hon. member for Maranoa say he is selling sugar at a less price than the other storekeepers in Roma? If the "Daily Standard" is right in its contention, is not the hon. member for Maranoa and others engaged in that pursuit robbing the public just as much as the storekeepers on this side of the House? (Opposition laughter.) I say if it is true; if the "Daily Standard's" contention is true that the storekeepers are robbing the public by making such enormous profits—if it is being done by storekeepers on this side of the House, then it is being done by storekeepers on the other side of the House to a similar degree. Members on that side of the House are always willing to criticise members on this side of the House.

An *HONOURABLE MEMBER*: Political fire-works.

Mr. MORGAN: It may be political fire-works, but it goes down with a section of the community, more especially if we sit dumb and allow it to go out without being contradicted. It is our duty to contradict these statements, and show by comparison that, although there are storekeepers who may be good Liberals, there are also storekeepers who may be good Labourites, and the Labour storekeepers are selling no cheaper than the Liberal storekeepers. We have also had an illustration in connection with the co-operative store in Brisbane.

Mr. LENNON: What do you know about that? (Laughter.)

[*Mr. Morgan.*]

Mr. MORGAN: I know something about it because I went into that store to buy something, and I found that I could not buy it cheaper there than I could buy it from Barry and Roberts or any other storekeeper in Brisbane. (Hear, hear! and laughter) The hon. member who interjected is prominently connected with that Co-operative Store, and he knows a great deal about it. If Barry and Roberts come under the article which appeared in the "Daily Standard," then I can say that the Co-operative Store must also come under that article, because their prices were just the same as Barry and Roberts. If Barry and Roberts are robbing the people, as is pointed out by the "Daily Standard," then the hon. member for Herbert and his Co-operative Store are also robbing the public, as their prices are no cheaper than those of Barry and Roberts.

Mr. LENNON: Why don't you give us a trial? You do not give the Co-operative Store a trial.

Mr. MORGAN: Yes, I did. I always buy where I can buy the cheapest, whether it is a political institution or not. The Co-operative Store is run to a great extent by the hon. member for Herbert, and if he can sell flour, rice, barley, and currants cheaper than these shops where the enormous profits are supposed to be made, then, as soon as the public get to know that they can get their goods cheaper at the Co-operative Store than these shops where the enormous profits are supposed to be made, then the present staff will not be able to serve the extra customers quick enough. There is a certain profit necessary on different articles. Some may have a profit of 15 per cent., and others will want a profit of 20 per cent. The hon. member for Maranoa will tell you that there is only a profit of 2 per cent. on kerosene. That is the profit on kerosene mentioned by the "Daily Standard" with kerosene at 4s. 3d. per tin. The "Daily Standard" says that on certain lines a profit of 40 to 46 per cent. is being made—on rice, for instance. That seems an enormous profit to make, but that profit is also being made by the Co-operative Store if they buy at the same price as the other stores. It has been distinctly shown that the wholesale people have not put up the price, except on a few imported articles.

Mr. BERTRAM and other *OPPOSITION MEMBERS*: They have.

Mr. MORGAN: You may be able to prove it to yourselves, but no one has proved it to this House. We married men who go round to the stores know very well that, although there is a big war on, the prices are, in many instances, no greater now than they were four weeks ago. (Opposition laughter.)

Mr. LENNON: You are the first person I have heard say that. You are the exception.

Mr. MORGAN: I am not the exception. I am not talking about the butchers, as we know that meat has gone up. We know that, with the exception of two or three articles, such as flour, prices in the stores have not gone up. Bread has not gone up. When we notice the fortunate position which the people of Queensland and Australia are in with regard to foodstuffs, I think it is unfortunate that the leader of the Opposition should have brought forward this motion to-day. This motion was not brought forward because the prices were wrong, but simply to give

an opportunity to the leader of the Opposition to criticise the composition of the prices board in Brisbane. He criticises that board simply because there is no one there who has got the "W.P.O." brand on his body—(laughter)—or because none of them possess the union ticket. That is the only reason that the motion was moved, and I hope members on this side will get up and speak on the question.

Mr. LENNON (*Herbert*): I am sorry that a good deal of bitterness has been brought into this debate, when there is no need for it at all.

Mr. MORGAN: The deputy leader of the Opposition introduced it.

Mr. LENNON: The hon. member who just resumed his seat introduced a lot of political bitterness which was quite unnecessary. The Chief Secretary said it was not a question of politics, and he should have kept it clear of politics.

The PREMIER: I did so.

Mr. LENNON: The hon. gentleman did not have the tact, or the good sense, or whatever it was, to show the people that it was not a political matter.

The PREMIER: It is not a political matter.

Mr. LENNON: Why, almost every member of every board—North, Centre, and South—are all of the one political colour.

The PREMIER: Then you know more about it than I do.

Mr. LENNON: It is a pity the hon. gentleman did not take the opportunity of appointing some representatives of another political colour.

The PREMIER: That is a demonstration that all the ability is on the one side.

Mr. LENNON: That is an easy way to get out of it. The hon. gentleman should have listened to some of the requests made from this side, and should have appointed men other than Liberals to control the prices.

The PREMIER: Is that your reason for this spending of hours?

Mr. LENNON: The hon. gentleman spoke as long as he thought necessary, and I have equal rights with him in giving my views on the matter. I want to have my say without any curtailment by the Chief Secretary. A good deal has been said about the members of the boards. I am quite with the hon. member for Mundingburra that the Townsville board is not constituted as it should have been. Why was not the gentleman he recommended appointed to the board? He was eminently fitted for the position in every way by experience, by long residence in the North, and in the handling of goods, and he knows the selling price both for cash and credit systems. He was a man who would have been a good representative for such a board. Instead of that, the Chief Secretary and his Executive Council have chosen Mr. Thorpe. I know Mr. Thorpe very well, and I have nothing to say against his character. But by his very associations and his environment—seeing that he is a representative of the mercantile class—he is secretary of the Merchants' Association, and secretary of the Master Butchers' Association—he must naturally keep in with the people who pay him his income.

The PREMIER: What occupation has the other gentleman you recommended?

Mr. LENNON: He has been engaged for twenty years in the grocery and ironmongery trade.

The PREMIER: And he is still manager of a grocery store.

Mr. LENNON: No. He had an ironmongery and general store, something like that of Barry and Roberts, without the drapery. He is not in with the merchants. He is entirely independent and free, and if the Chief Secretary had appointed a man like that, it would have prevented any criticism of the board from this side. Mr. Swales is an engineer—a first-class engineer. (Hear, hear!) No doubt he has first-class qualifications in that respect. He was once mayor of Townsville, and he knows a lot about machinery and engines. He is a very decent, upright man, but what does he know about the prices of goods? Nothing whatever. Another member of the Townsville board is Mr. J. N. Parkes, a very old resident of Townsville, and very well known to the hon. member for Mundingburra and myself, but he knows nothing at all about the prices of goods. He knows more about the price of land in Townsville, and about the formation of companies and the sale of shares and scrip and stock. He knows nothing at all about household economy. For the last four years he has not been keeping house, but has been living in an hotel, and consequently he knows nothing about the difficulties that confront a housekeeper at the present time on account of the high prices of goods. This discussion has shown at all events what splendid defenders the merchants of this city, and of Queensland, have in this Chamber. We have had the hon. member for Murrumba, and the hon. member for Maryborough, and the hon. member for Burrum all standing up and defending the merchants of Brisbane and Queensland. I am not aware that they have been attacked in any way. The only thing I would like to say about the Southern Board—I do not know what they have done in the North—is that they do not appear to have gone to the bedrock of this matter. They have begun at the wrong end, in my opinion. They should have commenced by investigating the merchants' books and finding out the landed cost of goods prior to the war, and seeing that they were not increasing their prices for such goods. If for goods purchased since they have had to pay higher freights and insurance, they would be justified in adding a proportionate price for such goods. That is a perfectly legitimate thing to do, and nobody could object to it. Instead of doing that, however, the board showed a kind of deference to those people, and abstained from interrogating them; and, when they had some merchants before them, they said they were not bound to answer questions. I suppose the chairman of the board had in his mind the great sugar kaiser of Australia, who declined to answer questions put to him by a Royal Commission some time ago, so that Mr. Watson was following a good example. We want a different class of board to that, and quite a number of suggestions were thrown out from this side. Some hon. members on this side suggested that we should have a man who was in touch with the workers of Queensland; others suggested that a sensible, prudent, and wise woman would be better on such a board than people who knew nothing about the cost of housekeeping. But the

Mr. Lennon.]

Premier, ignoring all these valuable suggestions, has appointed political boards in every case.

The PREMIER: Eminently qualified!

Mr. LENNON: The hon. gentleman had a splendid chance of letting the public see that he was not a hide-bound Liberal, and that he could rise above his political proclivities by appointing someone of another political colour than his own. The hon. member for Murrumba devoted a good deal of attention to the beef being sold by the Redbank meatworks. The hon. member says that those works are selling brisket of beef for 2d. a lb. Now, brisket is being sold by the retailers for 4½d. per lb. There is an enormous rise. But I would like to know whether the hon. member, or the hon. member who followed him in describing the beauties of this brisket, would like to feed upon it. We know the reason why it is not permitted to be exported to the old country. I am not going to say that it is not fit for human consumption, if properly treated, but at the same time I would not care about having a bit of noded beef set before me for breakfast to-morrow morning. It is all very well for those interested in the matter to defend it, but I say that, if it is not fit for the people 10,000 miles away, it is not fit for the people of Queensland. It is not labouring the question too much to say that, if this meat is good, it ought to be sold at a cheaper price. Well, who is going to regulate it if the Government will not step in and interfere with those local butchers who want to buy it for 2d. per lb. and sell it for 4½d.? If the Premier will not ask this board to prevent such extortion, then this board is absolutely useless, because it is appointed to deal with all the necessities of life. Some hon. members have contended that the Act is not intended to apply to wholesalers. That is utterly wrong—it does. It specifically mentions wholesalers. The trouble is that the wholesalers seem to enjoy a sort of immunity. They are too high and mighty to be approached.

The PREMIER: They have been approached.

Mr. LENNON: I know from experience that the wholesaler occupies quite a different social position to the retailer. The man who sells soap by the box, kerosene by the case, and sugar by the bag is quite a different mortal from the man who sells soap by the bar and sugar by the pound. I have been both a wholesaler and a retailer, and I know the nice social distinctions that are drawn between the two classes. (Laughter.) I do not draw them. The hon. member for Murrumba seems to think that merchants are beyond reproach—that there is no such thing as a merchant trying to make profit out of any particular difficulty or trouble. Such a thing has never been heard of. I would not say that the merchants are any worse than other people or that they try to make exorbitant profits out of the necessities of other people. I would not advance such an argument for a moment, but I do say that the merchants of Brisbane and other parts of Queensland are not all “Simon Pures” or all “Truthful Jameses.” Then, too, the hon. member for Burrum expressed the utmost surprise at anybody having the bare notion of attempting to fix prices for anything. Why, it was only last session that the hon. member not only expressed himself most eloquently and emphatically in support of the fixing of the

price of cane, but he issued a pamphlet, splendidly prepared, excellently printed, and widely circulated, advocating the absolute necessity, if the sugar industry of this State was to be saved, of having boards to fix the price of cane. The hon. member also referred to the desirableness of co-operation. I think the hon. member for Wide Bay also spoke about the desirableness of forming co-operative stores, and he spoke about the “masters of unions.” What he means by that I know not. The unions have no masters at all. In fact, they do not like the term “master”; and in the Acts of Parliament that we pass we generally use the word “employer” in place of “master.” The hon. member made some reference to the Queensland Co-operative Cash Store. The hon. member for Murilla also made a not very complimentary reference to the same store. And these are not the only hon. members who have made reference to that store. I regret to say that they have trotted this thing out on various occasions—for what purpose I cannot conceive, because it is a perfectly legitimate business, started for the purpose of giving people not only goods reasonably cheap in price, but goods that are, at the same time, of the best quality. Many people may sell as cheaply, but they cannot give the same good quality. (Laughter.) The Home Secretary went out of his way last session to drag in this Queensland Co-operative Cash Store.

The HOME SECRETARY: Why, your own shareholders did it, and they tackled you.

Mr. LENNON: Because my shareholders tackled me, that is no reason why the hon. gentleman opposite should get “off his dipper” also. The hon. gentleman takes a delight in dragging in things of that sort; but I think he went quite beyond the bounds of decency in referring to this store as he did. Since the store has been attacked again to-night, I think it is my right, as well as my duty, to defend it from the aspersions that have been cast upon it to-night and previously by the Home Secretary. On page 1854, volume cxv., of “Hansard,” for 1913, when speaking on the Elections Acts Amendment Bill—and I do not know what the Co-operative Store had to do with that Bill—the hon. gentleman said—

“They had an instance in that co-operative concern which was so ably managed by the hon. member for Herbert”—

Let me say that the hon. member for Herbert does not manage the store. That shows the ignorance of the Home Secretary.

The HOME SECRETARY: You are one of the shareholders' directors. If you have no management, perhaps that accounts for the state of the store.

Mr. LENNON: At that time I was chairman of directors of the store, but everybody knows that the chairman of directors of the Queensland National Bank, for instance, is not the general manager of the Queensland National Bank. The hon. member for Townsville will appreciate the distinction which I draw. The hon. gentleman is a director of the Bank of North Queensland, but he would not like to be charged with any of the mistakes of the general manager and

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held responsible in this House. I want to show the unfairness of the Home Secretary. He went on to say—

“who unfortunately was not there. . . Here they had an example of the tyranny of the Trades Hall.”

That has also been referred to by the hon. member for Murilla—

“Once a man was there he must remain there. He was followed to the courts, if he happened through sickness to fail to meet the calls made on him.”

The HOME SECRETARY: Oh, yes; I remember you caused bailiffs to be put into your unfortunate shareholders' houses.

Mr. LENNON: That is an absolute misrepresentation, and the hon. gentleman knows it, and if he does not know it he has no right to make it in this House. I challenge the hon. gentleman to make that statement outside the House, and I promise him that he will get a writ the following morning. The hon. gentleman also said—

“Bailiffs were put into his house and his poor traps of furniture sold up.”

The HOME SECRETARY: Hear, hear!

Mr. LENNON: The hon. gentleman justifies that, though it is absolutely false. Then the hon. gentleman continues—

“He was not permitted to obtain a livelihood. As he had already said, man's inhumanity to man was not more greatly exemplified than it was in the action of the unions, of which the political Labour party were the representatives, than in their action of enforcing preference to unionists.”

All that was directed against the Queensland Co-operative Cash Store, but there was absolutely no truth whatever in the hon. gentleman's statement. For some purpose—I cannot think what it was—merely to sling mud at the unions and try to discredit this party—the hon. gentleman criticised that store in a most unjustifiable way. Instead of the Queensland Co-operative Cash Store ever bothering a man at his house with bailiffs, they gave the Trades Hall coupons to the value of £3,000. To their credit be it said, they showed their confidence in the trades unions which the hon. gentleman sneers at, and the Trades Hall, and I challenge the hon. gentleman to mention a single case in connection with any industry in this State when any trades union gave a coupon or an undertaking which they failed to discharge.

The HOME SECRETARY: Your shareholders did not seem to have the same appreciation of you.

Mr. LENNON: Yet the hon. gentleman comes into this House and sneeringly refers to the Co-operative Store when he was discussing the Elections Bill, which had nothing whatever to do with the question, for the purpose of merely making a little cheap political capital out of an opponent who happens to sit opposite to him. He glories in it. I do not know where he gets his opinions from; I do not know whether they are made in Australia or not.

The HOME SECRETARY: I do not know where yours are made, anyhow.

Mr. LENNON: Probably like some of his, over in Germany. Perhaps some of his opinions are made in Germany; I cannot say.

The hon. member for Wide Bay spoke up for the members of the Brisbane Board, and put up a defence of Mr. Cheeseman, but not a member of the House had named Mr. Cheeseman. Mention had been made of Mr. Watson, who was a mercantile broker, who had made his money through the merchants, and anyone who is in that position, like Mr. Thorpe, of Townsville, had no right to be on this board. Those are the very men who should be off the board—the men who serve the merchants. I do not say that the merchants in Brisbane are worse than they are in Sydney, Melbourne, or Adelaide, yet we know that they are out for profit. We know that every man who carries on a large business looks for profit, and when a board goes to work and practically raises the price of nearly every item of daily consumption above its present price, when there is no need of such action, there is a temptation offered to the merchants, and if they are not all men of the very highest virtue they will raise their prices up to the limit fixed by the board.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member has exhausted the time allowed him by the Standing Order.

HON. R. PHILP (Townsville): I am sorry the discussion has taken a party turn. I do not think there should be any party feeling in the question of prices at all. From my experience—and I have had some, but not a great deal—it makes no difference to a man what his politics are so long as the prices suit him. It makes no difference to members of a price board as to what their politics are so long as they are honest men. I do not know many on these boards. I certainly know the Northern Board; and I know Mr. Watson on the Southern Board. Mr. Watson has perhaps had as much experience in buying and selling goods as any man in Queensland, and if he does not know the price of goods nobody else does. He is not in business now, but he was for a long time managing one of the keenest cutting grocery houses in Queensland. I claim that a mercantile broker is not dependent on the merchants for his trade; it is the other way about. The mercantile broker is dependent on the retailer for his business; he buys for the retailer.

Mr. LENNON: Yes; but the merchant who has stock in various lines puts them in the hands of the broker to find buyers for them.

HON. R. PHILP: He is glad for anyone to buy his stock, and the merchant is more dependent on the broker than the broker is on him.

Mr. HUNTER: You suggest that the merchant depends on the broker?

HON. R. PHILP: Yes, more than the broker depends on the merchant. The broker is an intermediary who is buying mostly for retail houses, and he goes round to the different merchants and buys where he can get the cheapest goods. No one can deny that the members of the board in Townsville are men of integrity. The board is composed of Mr. Parkes, who was mayor at one time, Mr. Swales, and Mr. Thorpe. At one time Mr. Parkes was the returning officer in Townsville, and the hon. member for Herbert will admit that he was always fair and honest in his dealings as such, and why should he not be honest now?

Mr. LENNON: He has not the knowledge.

Hon. R. Philp.]

HON. R. PHILP: I take it that he will be chairman of the board.

Mr. FOLEY: No; the mayor is chairman.

HON. R. PHILP: Well, the mayor represents the townspeople. Who is more fitted than the mayor of a town to say what shall be charged the people for their goods? If the mayor does not know, I think you will find that the mayor's knows, and it does not take a man long to find out; he can go down the town for a day and find out all about it. Mr. Parkes is a business man, and he will weigh the opinions of the mayor and Mr. Thorpe, and between the two he will come to a fair decision. No matter what Mr. Parkes's political opinions may be, he does most of his business with the working classes of Townsville, selling them allotments, and if he has any leaning one way I think it would be towards them.

Mr. LENNON: He does not get his commission from them; he gets it from the other side.

HON. R. PHILP: Mr. Parkes is a very keen business man, one of the keenest business men in Townsville, and it will not take him a week or a day to find out the wholesale and retail prices of commodities. Mr. Thorpe is a commission agent, and is more dependent on the custom of the retailer than on that of the wholesale man; he knows the values of goods wholesale and retail; and I think you will find that he can be trusted to fix fair prices just as much as any member of any board in Queensland. A retail grocer can buy his stock anywhere; if he does not get goods at prices which satisfy him in Townsville, he can go to Brisbane, Sydney, or Melbourne. I take it that if anyone attempts to corner goods in the wholesale trade, the board will find out and take the necessary action to prevent it. There is no doubt that imported goods are costing more now than they were before the war, but there is not much difference in the price of most of the goods made in Australia.

Mr. LENNON: It is stated that in Townsville the prices have been raised from 10 to 12 per cent.

The PREMIER: Not the prices of local goods.

Mr. LENNON: Yes.

HON. R. PHILP: Goods made in Australia have not gone up in price, and there is no reason why the retail prices should be increased, if the makers of the goods have not raised their prices. It is a pity that the name of the Colonial Sugar Refining Co. should have been brought into this debate, because they are doing a very fair thing by consumers. The sugar I use costs about £20 15s. per ton. The price of that sugar in London to-day is £30 per ton, and if the Colonial Sugar Refining Co. had put their price up to £30 per ton in Australia, you could not import sugar any cheaper. I believe the canegrowers are very much annoyed that they are not getting more than they are, but, however that may be, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company are not taking advantage of the situation as most people would do, in view of the big price outside, to raise their prices. If there are any people charging high prices, why do not those who complain start co-operative stores? Why do not members opposite do it?

Mr. LENNON: You try it.

[Hon. R. Philp.]

HON. R. PHILP: I am satisfied, and do not need to try it. The hon. member for Herbert made the statement that all trade unions paid their debts. Does the hon. member remember a little store at Hughenden once?

Mr. LENNON: Yes, I remember that store.

HON. R. PHILP: Does the hon. member remember how much it paid?

Mr. LENNON: I ought to know.

HON. R. PHILP: The hon. member said trade unionists always paid their debts.

Mr. LENNON: What about all the white-washed banks?

HON. R. PHILP: I think all the banks are paying their way pretty well now. But the hon. member boasted that trade unionists always paid their debts, and that is my reason for referring to that incident.

Mr. LENNON: I said that when trade unions gave an undertaking, they did not fail to discharge it.

HON. R. PHILP: The hon. member knows that there are any number of trade unionists who do not pay their debts, just as there are other people who do not pay their debts.

Mr. LENNON: Yes.

Mr. GILDAY: The hon. member for Herbert spoke of an organisation.

HON. R. PHILP: Well, was that not an organisation at Hughenden? It was a co-operative trade union store. I should not have referred to this matter were it not for the assertion made by the hon. member for Herbert.

Mr. LENNON: And I stand by it.

HON. R. PHILP: The hon. member for Ithaca told us that the retail butchers in Brisbane are charging £3 14s. per head more for beef now than they did two years ago. I can prove in two minutes that cattle cost them more now than they did two years ago.

Mr. HUXHAM: How much more?

HON. R. PHILP: I will tell you, but before doing so, let me say that sometimes retailers buy their cattle cheaper than meat companies do. In 1912 meat cost 19s. 6d. per cwt., and the same quality of meat to-day costs 32s. per cwt.

Mr. HUXHAM: The pastoralists must be having a good time.

HON. R. PHILP: Some of them are having a very good time. Last year meat cost 21s. per cwt., as against 32s. per cwt. this year, and cattle are costing butchers £3 10s. per head more now than they did two years ago, and by-products were worth 50 per cent. more two years ago than they are to-day. Again I say, if anybody is dissatisfied with the price of meat, why do they not start a co-operative butcher's shop. The hon. member for Ithaca has been a butcher, and he can go into the yards and buy cattle and slaughter them.

Mr. HUXHAM: We have not the capital.

HON. R. PHILP: Capital is nothing at all to hon. members opposite; they are always

boasting in this House that they own the capital and produce all wealth. Why do they not use some of it in the way I have suggested? The best beef put through the Redbank Meatworks is not sold in Queensland, but is shipped home. The stuff they sell here is not their best, and what is more, they do not deliver it, but get the cash at the works. What meat they cannot export they sell here; I do not say it is bad, but I say it is not of as good quality as you get from the butcher. They are not retail butchers at all. They only sell it here because they cannot export it, and that is why they can sell it cheap. What I would recommend to anybody who is dissatisfied with the present prices is to start something on their own. The hon. member for Herbert will tell you that there is not much in groceries, wholesale or retail, but, to my mind, the people who have made the most out of groceries are the retailers. Competition between the wholesalers is so keen that there is very little in it.

Mr. HUNTER: There is less than in the retail.

Hon. R. PHILP: That is what a retailer says. I have seen retailers, myself, amass means and retire. My old colleague, the hon. member for Mundingburra, tells me that his friend has retired. He was a retailer for twenty years, and I suppose he has retired with means and has done very well out of it.

Mr. FOLEY: He was saving money.

Hon. R. PHILP: All the more credit to him. It is the same with the retail grocer or draper. And as to this class distinction between the wholesaler and retailer, I have been both, but it certainly never made a bit of difference to me whether I was behind the counter or where I was. I take it a man is a man whether he sells retail or wholesale, and it is a pity that the hon. member for Herbert should make the distinction.

Mr. LENNON: You were in society and I was not.

Hon. R. PHILP: He was a leading member of society and I never was. (Loud laughter.) This Act was passed to help the working classes by seeing that no unscrupulous storekeeper or merchant advanced his goods, and if it fails we must try to alter it, but up to the present time, so far as I know, there has been no great need of it. I only want a little sugar, a little clean sugar. I lead the simple life. I have porridge for my breakfast in the morning, and nothing else, and I think it would be a good thing for the people if they took more of that and less meat. I think that we should all lead the simple life for a couple of years now. It would be a splendid thing, because for some time past everybody has been too extravagant. Look at the enormous amount spent in pinos and motor-cars! It would very likely feed a million troops for a year.

Mr. THEODORE: 8s. a day do not buy motor-cars.

Hon. R. PHILP: There is nobody in Queensland working for 8s. a day now. At any rate, all classes, both rich and poor, have been far too extravagant. Look at the picture shows every night. You see, night after night, women with children in their arms, going to these shows, and the same applies to all amusements—racing, and every-

thing else. Why, at one of the races the other day, no less than £18,000 went through the totalisator.

Mr. THEODORE: Taken out of the working man's pocket.

Hon. R. PHILP: I will tell you a story about the working man. When I was president of the meat company, I knew a man who was very steady. I met him later on and asked him how he was getting along. He said, "One time we used to put ten bob on a horse, now we put £5." I was very sorry to hear it, because they have been having good times lately. I hope that these bad times will make us more economical. I know that the bad times before put many a man on his mettle, and he came out of them a better man than he was before. At all events, this Bill was passed to help the working man, to try to relieve the wage-earner who was getting goods from retail shops.

Mr. THEODORE: The Government have made a farce of it.

Hon. R. PHILP: I do not know all the men on the boards, but all the men I do know are strictly honourable men; men who can be trusted by both sides. (Hear, hear!) I do not know what the hon. member's occupation was, whether he ever sold goods, but I can tell him that the storekeepers do not often get the best of it, especially on a goldfield or a tinfield, and they are more to be pitied than to be blamed.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member has occupied the time allowed to him by the Standing Order.

Mr. BERTRAM (*Marce*): Hon. members on the other side of the House who are merchants have indignantly repudiated the charge that has been made by members on this side that wholesale prices have been raised; but it is a remarkable fact that no attempt has been made to refute the statement that appeared in the "Daily Standard" some days ago. I have in my hand a letter, received from a retailer in this city, showing that wholesale prices have advanced, and it is a surprising thing that neither the hon. member for Maryborough nor the hon. member for Murrumbidgee, who so indignantly repudiated the suggestion that the prices had been raised, did not reply to those statements.

The PREMIER: Will you mention the lines?

Mr. BERTRAM: Yes. I made inquiries from a somewhat prominent retailer in the city regarding wholesale prices, and he supplied me with a list, which I propose to read, showing the prices before the war and the prices after the war began, and I want to say here that these advances were made, not on goods imported since the war began, but on goods that were in stock in the merchant's warehouse. I will read them. The merchant's price for flour before the war was £8 15s.; it now is £10 10s. per ton. Cream of tartar was 10½d. per lb. before the war, and now is 2s. 3d. Fine salt was at £3 15s. per ton, and now is at £4 15s. Holbrook's sauce was 8s. 7½d. per dozen, and now is 10s. 7½d.

The PREMIER: They have not been dealt with. In any case, we can do without that.

Mr. BERTRAM: I know very well that a number of these lines are imported lines, but I say that, owing to the fact that they were

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imported before the war, the merchants are not justified in making these advances. To proceed, Morton's pickles were 10s. 6d. per dozen, and now are 12s. Van Houten's cocoa was 3s. 1d., now it is 4s. Morton's 5-oz. castor oil, price before the war, 4s. 6d. per dozen, now 5s. 9d. per dozen; Morton's [8 p.m.] 5-oz. olive oil, price before the war, 5s. 6d. per dozen, now 6s. 6d. per dozen; carbide, price before the war, 14s. 9d. per cwt., now £1 10s. per cwt.; all kinds of tinned fish, which are largely used by the working classes, have advanced 1s. per dozen; and kerosene has advanced from 8s. per case to 8s. 8d. per case.

The PREMIER: Not yet dealt with.

Mr. BERTRAM: Wax vestas, price before the war, 3s. 7½d., now 4s. 6d. The writer of this letter concludes by saying—

"You will see by these few prices that it is the merchant and not the retailer who is responsible for the rise, and who is taking every possible advantage. The few lines quoted are just particular lines picked out, but not all, by any means."

I contend, with the hon. member for Herbert, that this board has begun at the wrong end, and instead of dealing with the retailer they should have dealt with the wholesaler first.

The PREMIER: We wanted to protect the consumer quickly.

Mr. BERTRAM: In almost every instance it is the wholesaler who is responsible for the advance in price. Speaking generally, my experience is that the retailer does not charge extortionate prices; and one of the first duties of the board was to have dealt with the matters I have referred to.

The PREMIER: The common necessities of life have been dealt with first.

Mr. BERTRAM: We know that tinned fish is a common necessary of life. There is scarcely a family that does not use tinned fish two or three times a week. This board would have been doing better work had they dealt with the merchants instead of dealing with the retailer. Had the Premier been anxious to appoint an absolutely impartial board, he would have refrained from appointing, on his own admission, a strong political supporter of his own. With other members who have spoken on this side of the House, I think the chairman of the board should not have been appointed, for the reason that he is getting his livelihood from the merchants. That fact cannot be gainsaid. Mr. Watson is a broker who, I suppose, would hesitate to do anything that is going to hurt the feelings of the merchants.

The PREMIER: You mean Mr. Watson would not; he is a man of integrity, which you may not be.

Mr. BERTRAM: I claim to be a man of as great integrity as the friend of the Premier.

The PREMIER: You cannot impugn his integrity, anyhow.

Mr. BERTRAM: I am not impugning his integrity, but I say had the Premier been anxious to appoint an impartial board he would have refrained from making that appointment.

The PREMIER: Not at all; he is the best man.

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Mr. BERTRAM: It has been said that the merchants do not compel the retailers to charge a certain price. The hon. member for Murrumba indignantly repudiated the charge that merchants sometimes compelled the retailer to charge a certain price, but he must know that in certain cases the retailer dare not sell at less than a certain price.

Mr. FORSYTH: Do you say the wholesale merchant forces them to charge a certain price?

Mr. BERTRAM: Will the hon. member say that the Oriental Tea Company do not compel the retailer to get 1s. 6d. per lb. for their tea?

Mr. FORSYTH: I say it is a proprietary line, which is a different thing altogether from general grocery lines.

Mr. BERTRAM: There are a number of other lines, and we know that in many cases the retailer is compelled to charge the price dictated by the merchant.

Mr. LENNON: The same with the price of tobacco.

Mr. BERTRAM: Yes, the same with tobacco and a number of other lines. So much has been said during this debate that I do not propose to occupy much more time. I hope something will be done to see that prices are not fixed at an unduly high rate. To my mind, the fixing of prices at a higher rate than those obtaining at present is an intimation to the retailer to advance prices, and it will be taken as such. Something should be done in the near future to compel this board to deal with the wholesaler, and not to pay so much attention to the retailer. I think, with the deputy leader of the Opposition, that the board has shown a weakness. The chairman of the board, when asking a question, has prefaced his question by almost making an apology. I understand that this board has plenary powers, and why did not the chairman of the board compel some of those witnesses to reply to the questions instead of evading them?

Mr. THEODORE: He did not swear them.

Mr. BERTRAM: I understand no witness has been sworn, and had the chairman done his duty he would have compelled some of the prominent witnesses who have been before him to reply to the questions that were asked.

Mr. HUNTER (Maranoa): The Premier, in replying to the question raised by the leader of the Opposition, said that the test of qualification of the board was the result that had been issued. Well, if we take the result, then we can find no qualification whatever. What is the result? As we find it to-day published in the Press, there has been a maximum price fixed on a few of the necessities of life. I do not propose to indulge in any warmth on this matter. My opinion is that unnecessary warmth has been imported into the discussion. The object of the leader of the Opposition in introducing this matter was to elicit information, because, according to the information received up to this stage, it is clear that the board is not going about this business as the House wished it to go. There was no intention when the Act was passed that the board should deal only with the retail storekeepers, but also with the merchants and manufacturers, and

more especially with the manufacturers, because the manufacturers have a large say in what the prices shall be, and it is no use the hon. member for Murrumba saying that the retailers are not compelled in some degree to charge certain prices. In many cases their supplies would be cut off if they dared to sell under a certain price. The hon. member for Warwick knows that very well.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: A very exceptional thing.

Mr. HUNTER: With every proprietary line in the market.

The PREMIER: Have proprietary lines been dealt with?

Mr. HUNTER: I hold that all lines should be dealt with as quickly as possible. As it is, the most important foodstuffs have not been dealt with yet. A common and necessary household necessity—flour—has not been touched yet. In Queensland flour has gone up in price since the war, and in other States it has been reduced.

The PREMIER: What is the price of flour in New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria?

Mr. HUNTER: I know since the war it came down 10s. per ton in Western Australia.

The PREMIER: It has since been increased in Western Australia.

Mr. HUNTER: I am quite prepared to take the hon. gentleman's word, if he says that it has since been increased there; but even then it has only gone to the price it was when the war broke out, whereas in Queensland flour has been increased by £2 to £2 5s. per ton.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: What is the price in Western Australia?

Mr. HUNTER: I am not in a position to say?

Mr. MORGAN: What is the price in Roma?

Mr. HUNTER: I will deal with Roma in my own time. What was the object of passing this legislation? Was it not to have power to deal with this question of increased prices? There is in human nature, just among retailers as among wholesalers, a desire to get as much as they can, particularly if there is anyone wanting to speculate on the stuff they sell, and the retailers feel, if there is to be speculation of any sort, that they have as much right to speculate on it as anyone else. The boards were appointed under the authority of this House and were given plenary powers to prevent the wholesalers and retailers from speculating in foodstuffs, whether locally manufactured or imported. The idea was to prevent anyone holding stocks and making a profit out of the stress that we are likely to pass through. What has happened? As shown by the hon. member for Marree, first of all the wholesale houses put up prices by 12½ to 15 per cent. on the stocks they held. That was not a fair thing to do. If the board had done what they were appointed to do, they should have inquired into the whole of that matter. They should have had sworn evidence and the production of documents, and they should have ordered that the prices be reduced if there was an increase in the price after war was declared, except when there was an increase in the landing charges, such as higher freights and higher insurance and

other matters of that description. Unless they could show that the landing cost was increased there should be no increase in the selling price for either retailers or wholesalers. That is the attitude I take up in regard to this matter. The hon. member for Murrumba told us that the wholesale houses had been waited on. The board was not asked to wait on the wholesale houses. They were asked to deal with the question of prices, and, if they wanted the wholesale merchants, they should have summoned them to appear before them and sworn them to give their evidence. They should have compelled them to submit their papers, documents, invoices, insurance bills, and everything else, and let the board see that the prices they charged were the prices that they charged before the war. The board has not entered into the spirit which animated the House when it passed this legislation. I do not want to make political capital out of this. I only want to see that the people are not charged more for their supplies than they paid before. Whether a man is a retailer, or a wholesaler, or whether he is a Brisbane or a Western Queensland merchant, where excessive prices are charged they must be dealt with. I should like to see the board deal with the whole lot of them, and use the power which is given to them by the Act. The hon. member for Murrumba stated that they had to take into consideration certain charges that had been imposed. We know that the cost is not the same for landing goods in different shipments, even although the original cost is the same. There is always a margin which is allowed by storckeeper to make up for extra incidentals of that description. We do not want the board to go into the matter as finely as that. All we ask them to do is to deal fairly between the merchant and the consumer, and to fill the position as representatives of the board somewhat in the way that this House intended they should do when we passed the Act. We are told that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company reduced their price of sugar instead of increasing it. We know that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company reduced the price of sugar twice between the 1st and 7th of July. That was before the war. The probabilities are that it would not have been reduced if they had known. I inquired of the manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company and got that information to-day, as I did not know anything about the price of sugar, and I did not know the price for the last three or four years as a matter of fact. I got the information from him in view of what was coming up in the House to-day. I know it is a common practice for flourmillers to reduce the price of flour, and I suppose the sugar companies do the same at certain times in the year. When a big crop is about to be harvested, the flourmillers and the sugar companies drop the price, and immediately there is a corresponding drop in the price of the raw material. In reducing the price of sugar, the sugar company would lose a few hundred pounds in the price of the refined sugar, but they would gain some thousands of pounds in the amount they have to pay for the raw article. That is done by the flourmillers, and I am not surprised to hear that the sugar companies do the same. The Premier seems to think that because these boards are capable of finding out the prices of goods, everything is all

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right. That is not the only qualification that the members of the board should hold. It is necessary that the members of the boards should be possessed of other qualifications besides. What is required of them is a better sense of justice and fairplay and a desire to carry out the intention of Parliament, which was responsible for their existence. The board in the South does not seem possessed of these qualifications. I do not say for one moment that Mr. Watson does not know as accurately and as minutely the prices of various articles of commerce in Brisbane as any other man here. But I do think that the Hon. the Premier, if he had been desirous of appointing an independent board who would have considered all the circumstances, that he would not have selected any political friends whatever. I should have thought that he would have gone out and obtained men of independent character, who would be possessed of sufficient ability to be able to trace from its source of manufacture and the despatch of goods to the very door of the merchant's store, and then be able to say what is the right price to charge. I do not say that any merchant should be asked to sell for less than what he has done hitherto. I say that the object of passing the Act was to fix a fair price, but not a maximum price over and above the prices charged to-day, especially as they have already been advanced on account of the war. The proper thing to do would be to order that the wholesale prices of goods in stock be not increased above what they were before the war, and that retail prices be based on what they were before the war commenced, with a percentage added for the Western districts to cover the cost of laying down stocks. The hon. member for Murilla and the hon. member for Burrum were good enough to ask if I endorsed the statement with regard to the prices charged for sugar in the West. Now, I want to be frank with the House and with those hon. members, though I think their object in asking if I endorsed the statement was really based on paltry personal considerations. I quite ignore that, however, and will give the hon. members a bit of information. If they want to know the price of goods in the West, I am prepared to give them the address of my firm, the name of my manager, and also to supply them with a letter to accompany their request to be supplied with a price list for all classes of goods in the West. I am not afraid of what they are doing. If they are doing wrong, the first man to be told of it would be myself. I was in Roma last week, but nobody made any complaint to me on the subject, and I did not even know until to-night what was the price of sugar in Roma.

Mr. MORGAN: The price of sugar was got from your firm in Roma.

Mr. HUNTER: I know the hon. member has got, or has handed to some other hon. member, an invoice from my firm. I know one or two things that are happening. Some friend in the House was good enough to tell me about it. However, the hon. member can get more than an invoice. He can get a complete price list, if it is any good to him; but I can assure the House that I did not know the price of sugar in Roma until to-night, and, if I had been asked the price at any time during the last six months, I could not have told it. I have given up my time entirely to politics, and I have men whom I trust and who know what I wish

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done, and, until they prove unworthy of that trust, I have no reason to doubt them.

Mr. MORGAN: Do you know the profits?

Mr. HUNTER: I know the profits once a year, and that is the time that I review matters. If they are not what I expect, I speak about it, but I only deal with returns and reports, not details. The price of sugar in the West, as given by the hon. members for Murilla and Burrum, corresponds with the price in Brisbane. The cost of laying down sugar in Roma from Brisbane by rail is £4 12s. 6d. a ton, and cartage is another 2s. 6d. a ton—or a total of £4 15s. Now, the difference in the price of sugar between Brisbane and Roma is exactly 2d. a lb. That amounts to £4 13s. 4d. per ton, so that really we are underselling the Brisbane grocers by 1s. 8d. per ton. I do not think it is fair to expect a country storekeeper to sell on the same level as the storekeepers in the city, and give the long terms country storekeepers are forced to do. That is the position so far as the Western storekeeper is concerned. I think it would be a good thing if the Government asked this board to send in a report as to their findings with regard to wholesale prices, and also if they speeded the board up with regard to fixing the prices of other foodstuffs. I believe this debate will do a great deal of good. Probably, it will direct the attention of the board to the statements that have been made here, and induce them to inquire more closely from the Premier what their functions are, and what Parliament really desires of them. To my mind, up to the present, the board is a farce. I do not think they should harass the storekeepers, who are just as much entitled to fairplay as anybody else at this time. As I said when the Bill was going through this Chamber, I believe the people themselves are largely responsible for the increased prices by rushing to get larger quantities than they require, and to prevent them buying larger quantities, prices have been raised, and, consequently, they do not buy. I believe the remedy lies not only in restricting the prices charged, but the quantities that should be sold. The one is just as important as the other. I rather regret that hon. members opposite have imported such warmth into the debate. I believe that the leader of the Opposition, in moving the adjournment of the House, desired to draw attention to what is happening with regard to this board, and to point out that it is not fulfilling the purpose for which it was appointed; and, if the House in its wisdom comes to that conclusion on the evidence adduced—and I do not see how it can come to any other conclusion—then good must ensue. No good can come from re-cremations such as have been going on with regard to party interests. This thing is too big for party. We have too great responsibilities resting on us at the present time to allow party considerations to influence our decision. As time goes on there are people who will find it almost impossible to get enough to live upon, and it is to preserve what we have at a reasonable price that we have appointed these boards.

Mr. THOUT: You are assisting to keep them out of work.

Mr. HUNTER: Probably I have done as much to find them work as the hon. member. I am doing my share in finding employment for people, and I certainly desire to see this board living up to the obligations which

Parliament has laid upon it; and if it does that, I feel sure it will deal at once with flour, bread, meat, and all other necessities of life. If this debate has the effect of drawing the attention of the board to that, it will have done a great deal of good.

Mr. HAMILTON (*Gregory*): No doubt many of the speakers on the other side have attempted to make a lot of political capital out of the fact that the leader of the Opposition has introduced this motion. It is quite evident, from the tone of the debate, that if the hon. gentleman had not drawn attention to the increase in the prices of commodities by this board, members on the other side would not have done so. It was quite apparent when the Bill was going through that there was a good deal of hostility on the part of hon. members on the other side who are in business to any attempt being made to control prices. But we were only doing what has been done in all the other States, and what has since been done in the old country. Because of something said by the deputy leader of the Opposition, hon. members opposite have tried to make out that members on this side were reflecting on certain storekeepers and others. I do not say that the storekeepers in Queensland are more dishonest than the storekeepers in other parts of the world, but we know very well that, no matter what legislation we pass, unless the administration is sympathetic that legislation is not going to be effective. We cannot say that the administration of this Act has been effective, so far as the actions of the boards are concerned. I do not know the reasons for the appointment of these gentlemen. I do not know one of those who have been appointed; but I do know that, instead of bringing prices down, they have fixed the prices of certain necessities of life higher than they are at the present time. That is not what the board was appointed for. Two or three of the principal necessities of life have not been touched yet by the board, and, judging by the manner in which they are calling witnesses and taking evidence, another three years will very likely be over before they come to any decision concerning some of the necessities of life. I take it that meat and flour are the principal necessities of life.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: What is regulating the price of flour to-day?

Mr. HAMILTON: The board is appointed to ascertain what is a fair selling price for flour. We know that certain millers the very day that war was declared put the price of flour up by £2 or £2 10s., and it had to come down again. The people we have to consider are the unfortunate people, where perhaps the bread-winner is out of employment, and not the storekeeper or the wholesale man. The members are pretty highly paid, I suppose, and all they can do is to fix prices above what they are at the present time. From what we can see of this board, there is going to be very little satisfaction got from them. A good deal of opposition has always been shown by hon. members opposite to State interference in any way. They believe in State socialism when it is a question of the State providing money to construct public works that are going to bring more grist to their mill, but when it is a question of the State stepping in to undertake anything in the interests of the great bulk of the people

they are always opposed to it. I see from some of the country papers that away out in some of the far Western districts meat is put up, and they are paying twice as much as what people have to pay in Brisbane. In some of the Western districts, where the beef is grown, the people are paying 6d. and 8d. per lb. for meat which people get for 4d. per lb. in Brisbane. If you take up the newspapers you find that the butchers are going to raise the price of meat. I think it is necessary for the members of these boards to get a move on. If the members of the board are going to conduct their inquiries by asking a butcher, as they did, if he was likely to be sent to Dunwich unless they allowed him to raise the price of meat, that is not the way to conduct an inquiry. I think the hardworking people in the State will be pleased that the leader of the Opposition has brought this motion forward this afternoon. Can you wonder at the workers recording their votes in the manner they did last Saturday? They are commencing to find out who really do look after their interests. We know that hon. members opposite during the last election campaign tried to impress on the workers that they were the only friends they had got; but when they have an opportunity of giving practical assistance to the workers, as they have here, by controlling the rapacity of those who are taking advantage of the times, and who are willing to prey on the workers by raising the price of commodities, those hon. members show very little sympathy. It is quite easy to see that the sympathies of those who have spoken on the other side this afternoon are more with the wholesale merchant and retailer than with the unfortunate consumer.

Mr. MORGAN: No; they are against the misstatements.

Mr. HAMILTON: The statements are true. The hon. member cannot deny that the board has raised the price of necessities, because you can buy cheaper in Brisbane than the prices fixed by the board.

Mr. MORGAN: If the board had a labour union ticket you would be perfectly satisfied. That is why you disagree with them.

Mr. HAMILTON: No; because they are making such a "hash" of the undertaking. They cannot get away from their political bias. Hon. members opposite made a great cry when Mr. George Ryland was appointed by the Commonwealth Labour Government to a position in the Northern Territory, but there is not a word said this afternoon when the chairman of a political committee is appointed as chairman of this board. It is quite evident that the members have been appointed for political reasons. The Premier said that he did not know what their politics were, and then he had to admit afterwards that one of these gentlemen was on his election committee. The board is a failure, and, like a great many other boards, it merely gives Ministers an opportunity of shielding themselves behind the board. The Government should get rid of the board and appoint one which will not be a failure. Judging by the way in which they are conducting their inquiries, the war will be over before they have come to a decision. All the Premier could say about the lines which have been raised was that they are imported lines; but they have no right to raise the cost of imported lines. They

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had the stocks in before war was declared, and have not paid high prices for them, and what right has the board to allow dealers to put on these high prices? The motion has done a lot of good, and will enable the people to see who their friends really are.

Mr. ADAMSON (*Rockhampton*): Personally, I would rather not have risen to speak in this debate, because there has been so much said, but I think it is right that a member of the Central district should voice some of his feelings with regard to the matter. When the Bill was before us, in the second-reading stage, I said the most important thing about it was the kind of boards which would be formed. I held then, and I hold now, that the boards should be as representative as possible, and if that idea had been carried out we might not have had this discussion to-night, because there would have been more confidence in the boards. So far as the Central Board is concerned, I have nothing to say about the members. As far as I know them, and I know two of them well, they are very decent men. They have only met once, but they have done their work very well thus far, and if the board in Brisbane had commenced like the Central Board, and dealt with wholesalers rather than with retailers, we might not have had this discussion. The Central Board has found that the cause of some things going up in price has been the fact that the wholesale merchants have increased the prices in a way which, to my mind, seeing the stocks they had in hand, was altogether unjustifiable. For instance, we find that one wholesale merchant has increased the price of Van Houten's cocoa $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb. That seems to be reasonable when you compare it with other wholesale merchants. I may say that one wholesale firm has raised the price of Van Houten's cocoa from 3d. to 6d. per lb., which means that the retailers have to advance the price to the consumer. Then, the hon. member for Warwick asked what was the cause of flour going up in price. According to the evidence of one firm, it is because farmers are withholding their wheat. I want to read a statement from the Rockhampton "Bulletin," of 8th September—

"Flour had advanced about £1 15s. a ton; the cause was the inability of the millers to get wheat. The farmers were withholding their wheat for higher prices, and there was a prospect of the export of wheat."

This quotation is taken from the evidence given by Nathan George Wetherell, salesman for the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company, at Rockhampton. If that is true, then the farmers are endeavouring to exploit the consumer; and the hon. member for Murilla, who is a great friend of the farmer, ought to remember that sometimes the farmers exploit the consumers as well as the middleman. The matter of dealing with prices and the cost of living I brought up in this House two years ago, and I thought then that some inquiry would be made into the matter. I am quite convinced that the leader of the Opposition and the deputy leader of the Opposition have done good service in bringing forward this motion this afternoon, and speaking in the way they have done. We are accused of wanting to make political capital out of the matter. I say that the whole of the argument from that standpoint has been brought on by members opposite, and that we on this side are simply

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performing a duty which I said in this House ought to have been performed two years ago. Two years ago I moved a resolution in this House, on private members' day, asking for an inquiry into the causes of the increased cost of living. I then said that boards should be appointed to fix prices, and in appointing boards now the Government are simply doing what has been forced upon them by the war in Europe. We on this side do not say that all merchants are dishonest, but we do say that some merchants are dishonest, and that that is the reason why it is necessary to appoint boards to fix prices. The Brisbane Board might have gone about their work in a very different way from what they have followed, and commenced with evidence from the wholesalers, afterwards obtaining the evidence of retailers. On the second reading of the Bill I referred to a case which happened in New Zealand, and the hon. member for Fortitude Valley mentioned the case of merchants in New Zealand who were granting rebates in an illegal way, and who refused to answer questions put to them by a Royal Commission, of which Sir Robert Stout was chairman. They were fined £1,000 for what I call their dishonesty, and when they appealed against that punishment the decision was upheld, and they had to pay heavy costs. Yet members tell us that we are charging merchants here with being dishonest. I have never done that. Every merchant here knows whether he is honest or not; if he is not an honest man he knows when he goes to bed at night that he goes to bed with a man who is not an honest man. (Laughter.) We simply say that some merchants are dishonest, and that it has been proved in courts of law that some are dishonest. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company refused to answer certain questions put to them by the Sugar Commission, and I say that if they had been honest in the matter they would have answered those questions. With regard to the board for the Central district, I know Mr. Jear and Mr. Kenna, and I know that both are decent men. I do not know Mr. English. If it is proved by their work that they are not acting fairly and squarely, I shall not be afraid to bring the matter up in this House and expose them. The members sitting on this side of the House feel that the appointments to the Southern Board are altogether of a party character; and, believing that, we had a perfect right to impugn the character of the board. I do not know Mr. Watson, or any member of the board, but if what is said of Mr. Watson is true, then he ought not to have a position on the board. I know that some members of this House feel that the character of the board is not what it ought to be, and that if all the merchants in Brisbane said what they thought on the matter there would be some revelations on this subject. I think this discussion will do good, in that it will show the board that if they do not do the square thing they will be dealt with in this House. I do not desire to make any political capital out of the matter, nor do I think the leader of the Opposition or the deputy leader of the Opposition wishes to make political capital out of it; and I believe that the discussion which has taken place will prove of some benefit to consumers in the Southern district.

Mr. HUXHAM (*Buranda*): I support the action of the leader of the Opposition in

bringing this matter forward, because it is in the interest of all householders, particularly of the women, who are complaining greatly of the advance in the prices of commodities. Not only do they complain of the advance in prices, but they look forward to the time when there will be a great number of unemployed in the city. This motion for the adjournment of the House is therefore very timely, because we should grapple with the situation now in order to prevent anything more serious happening. The Government should enlarge the board and make it more representative than it is at present. I know two of the gentlemen constituting the board, one of whom is a personal friend of mine; but I must say that the wisdom of appointing them members of the board does not appeal to me very much. I think it would be much better if the board were appointed on the lines followed by the Premier of Victoria in appointing the board in that State; and it cannot be said that he is sympathetic with the Labour party. The board in that State is a representative one, and I have no doubt that the result of their action will be very satisfactory to those most concerned—that is, the poorer part of the community, who suffer so much when the prices of the necessities of life are increased. The Victorian board consists of Mr. Adamson, M.L.C., representing the Government; Mr. Lascelles, representing the wheatgrowers; Mr. Durling, chairman of the Hawthorn Tramway Trust, representing the Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Long, secretary of the Bootmakers' Union, representing the workers; and Mr. Willis, president of the Greasers' Association. I think that if the board for Southern Queensland were enlarged so as to include a representative of the workers, and even some women, as has been suggested, it would be found that such appointments were justified. It has been asked if the merchants of this community are not as honest as merchants elsewhere. Hon. members who have read this morning's "Courier" will remember that it contains some remarks by the present Minister for Defence, Mr. Millen, as to the need of the public being protected, and that he explained that the Federal Government had issued a certain regulation, which showed the necessity of guarding the public against big merchants who are supplying the Defence Department with certain necessities for the war. If merchants there are doing things which render it necessary for protective measures, I do not know that we may not have merchants here who will do similar things. I do not say that they are dishonest here, but I do say that, from the strictures that Senator Millen has poured on them there, we must regard it as likely that we have something of the same kind here. This is a matter of very serious importance to the bulk of the community. We know very well that there are many unemployed in our midst, and we must naturally expect that they will increase before the war ends, and if we are to have further unemployment and enhanced prices it will mean that Queensland will be suffering for the next few months even more severely than she did in the disastrous times of 1893. And I believe that members on both sides do not want to see an acute position arising here, and they will look the matter fairly and squarely in the face and see if they cannot induce the Government to take the matter in hand with a view to enlarging the scope of the board as I have suggested. Now, as the board can meet often—there is no reason why they

should not meet daily—there is no reason why they should fix a maximum price at all. They have to deal with articles of local production, and they know very well that they can handle those things without much fear of very greatly enhanced prices. There is no reason why manufacturers and merchants who are engaged here should take advantage of the public when they are handling a locally-made article. And it is all very well to say that the prices are not rigged by the wholesale merchants. I have in my mind a firm who were practically driven insolvent in South Brisbane owing very largely to their not obeying a certain manufacturer of proprietary goods, with the result that they were cut off his list. There is that method of dealing with people, and there is no getting away from the fact that the man who holds a proprietary article, or even large stocks of goods, can compel the retailer to sell at any price that he wishes. And I further maintain that the question of price, as it can be regulated by holders of large stocks and manufacturers, should be grappled with properly. So far as booking is concerned, I do not see any reason why booking prices should be unduly advanced. We are told that there is a big difference between the cash price and the booking price. That has not obtained to any large extent in the past, and I do not see why people who are out of work temporarily here for the next few months should be unduly harassed by having to pay increased prices. They must have been good customers in the past, and by penalising them to the extent of 1d. or 2d. they will be unduly harassed. From what the leader of the Opposition said this afternoon, we may take it that the profit made by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company amounts to 23 per cent., and I do not see that that is a justifiable state of affairs. The Premier, in speaking this afternoon, referred to the price of bacon that is handled by Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones, as the representative of Feggitt, Jones, and Company, stated the reason why they had advanced prices, but he did not say that he collared all the profits; it does not mean that the profits are all collared by the manufacturer. It may mean that the farmers are holding their pigs back and charging a higher price for them, and Mr. Jones has to pay it.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: Will it pay farmers to hold pigs back now?

Mr. HUXHAM: I do not know that, but we do know that the price has been advanced. Mr. Jones admitted that there had been an increase in the demand for bacon, inasmuch as the people had found that the price of beef was too high. I know not from what cause it has arisen, but I do know that whatever advance was made, so far as Mr. Jones was concerned, it was a fairly legitimate one. I do not think the recrimination by the hon. member for Murilla against the hon. member for Herbert and the hon. member for Maranoa was justified. I think we are here to do the best we can for the community in the present strained circumstances, and I believe that they will become more strained as time goes on, and I hope that the Premier will see the wisdom of enlarging the scope of the board in the direction I have suggested, by bringing in a representative of the workers, and not leaving it wholly in the hands of those of whom the workers are suspicious so far as doing a fair thing is concerned.

Mr. Huxham.]

Mr. G. P. BARNES (Warwick): The general ignorance of some members regarding some commodities is so outstanding that one cannot refrain from making some reference to it. The hon. member who has just resumed his seat has admitted that in at least one instance—the case of pigs—the manufacturer is quite justified on account of the laws of supply and demand in increasing the price in the way and to the extent he has.

Mr. HUXHAM: If he has paid more for his pigs.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: Yes. Many references have been made to the article of flour. I maintain, without the fear of the slightest contradiction, that, war or no war, flour to-day would be not only at the price it is, but very likely at a much higher price. All over the world, and in Australia in particular, the price of wheat has advanced, and I defy any man to run a business—whether it be a milling business or any other business—without responding to the rise and fall in the price of the article he may manufacture. It is so in the case of the supply of cattle with the butcher: it is so in the case of pigs; and the same rule applies all round. I have just worked out, whilst listening to the arguments that have been made by hon. members, the actual cost of flour made with wheat, so far as my experience is concerned. And wheat will have to be brought here if we are to continue to be supplied with flour. And if wheat cannot be purchased for less than 5s. 3d. per bushel, which is the price ruling in Sydney to-day, then I maintain—allowing the full price given for bran and pollard quoted in the papers to-day—that flour will cost the miller £12 13s. 8d. per ton.

Mr. HUXHAM: The hon. member for Murrumbidgee said that he could sell flour at £10 per ton.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: I am pointing out the ruling price of wheat to-day, and when wheat advances flour will have to advance. But the hon. member will turn round and say, "You paid for your wheat a long time ago." The hon. member for Cunningham was pleased the other night to say that, but do the millers buy wheat to look at? The great bulk of the wheat that we bought then has been turned into flour and money received for it long ago. Take our own case. I have gone into the figures at home, since I spoke here the other day in connection with this matter, and I find that seven-eighths of the available stocks held by our firm—and I believe this applies to other firms—will be required to fulfil orders received months and months ago, and of the other eighth I find that the cost of that wheat, when put into flour, exceeds by several shillings per ton the amount that we as millers are asking as an advance.

Mr. RYAN: Do you say a rise in flour to £12 a ton is justified?

Mr. G. P. BARNES: I am saying that the price of flour is £10 10s. per ton so far. The hon. member is trying, perhaps not wilfully, but his interjection tends to show that I am advocating that flour should be £12 13s. 8d. per ton. If it is to bear a profit, it should be more than that. But

[9 p.m.] my argument is that if you buy wheat at 5s. 3d. per bushel in Sydney, add the 6d. or 7d. per bushel, which

[Mr. G. P. Barnes.]

it will cost to land it here, you will not only require £12 13s. 8d. per ton for flour, but you will require a profit on top of that. But the millers to-day have not taken full advantage of the conditions which obtain in connection with wheat. I have proved, and my company's books will prove, that we have not taken advantage of the advance; and whether there be war or no war, flour would have advanced in sympathy with the advance in the price of wheat in the Southern States. If you desire that flour should be continued to be sold at say £10 10s. or £11 per ton, then you must make arrangements for the miller to be supplied with wheat, and I go so far as to say, you supply the miller with wheat at the price and he will turn out the flour for you. The other evening hon. members made statements as to whether they could not run certain industries. I say buy the wheat and we will grist it for you at cost, and then see how you get on. (Hear, hear!) Insinuations have been made, especially in regard to the milling industry, where the trade is done by making forward sales. The insinuations that have been made are positively unjust and some hon. members opposite ought to know better.

Mr. MAY: It is only a gamble; you buy early.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: Yes; you buy early and you sell early; and the man who does not make his sales early will make no sales at all.

Mr. THEODORE: Do you gamble in food-stuffs?

Mr. G. P. BARNES: I do not thank the hon. member for his insinuation. His gambling is in another commodity. He is gambling and trading on the credulity of the men who trust him. It would be beneath me to trade on the sympathies of a credulous and confiding public. I do not know the exact position of every other miller in the State, but I do know that there is a general shortage, and I care not what price the board dictates, when supplies are out, the miller will have to respond to the advance that he must pay for the wheat that is coming forward.

Mr. HUNTER: The board is not asked to do anything less.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: I feel sure that if the board do their duty in that particular respect, you will find that they will endorse the action that we, as millers, have taken. I have no objection, if the leader of the Opposition will come along, to showing him facts and figures to bear out what I have said.

Mr. LARCOMBE (Keppel): The hon. member for Warwick regrets the attacks that have been made on the members of the board which has given it award for the Brisbane area. If that is regrettable, so also are the attacks that are from time to time made by hon. members opposite on the hon. member for Maranoa and the hon. member for Herbert. They very lightly make attacks on those hon. members, and yet they complain bitterly when there is any retaliation. There has been no definite charge levelled at either of those hon. members, but simply innuendoes and insinuations, and members opposite should be unworthy of making such charges, particularly when they complain so bitterly of the charges levelled at the members of the board whose work we are criticising this evening. I contend that we have

a perfect right to criticise the work of the board. Certainly, I am not going to make any charge against the members of the board as to their private characters, but I certainly do object to the award they have arrived at. I say they have worked on wrong principles, and have arrived at a wrong determination, and surely we can do that without recrimination! Surely we can do that honestly and fairly, and we can ask that the members of this board should be subjected to the same criticism that members of this House are. It is evident that the object for which this Act was passed has not been achieved. What was the object of it? Was it not to prevent an increase in the price of commodities to the people of Queensland at this juncture? Was it not to protect them, during a time of necessity, from being exploited by unscrupulous traders? That was the object that the Premier and his colleagues gave when they were discussing this legislation, and that object has undoubtedly not been attained, as the prices, according to the determination of the board, have been fixed much higher than they were previously. Where is the utility or sense or reason of appointing a board that has fixed prices higher than had previously obtained? The award is simply farcical. The object of the Act has not been achieved as far as the Southern district is concerned. I trust that, as far as Central Queensland and North Queensland are concerned, the results will be different. I have hopes, at any rate, that the Central Queensland award will be different. Knowing, as I do, the personnel of the board, I feel sure that they will work on different principles to those worked on by members of the board in Southern Queensland. There is a suspicion—a very strong suspicion—in view of what has taken place, that the award of this board is a job put up on the part of the Government to discredit the principle of fixing prices. We know that members opposite are strongly opposed to the fixing of prices, and what could be of more value, politically, than that the work of the board in fixing prices should be an absolute failure? Hon. members in the corner even suggested that when the Act was being discussed, there has been no attempt to deal with the Act in the spirit in which it was passed, either here or in the other States. The hon. member for Warwick also states that flour must increase because wheat has increased in price. That does not harmonise with the statement made by the hon. member for Drayton, when he intimated, by means of a question, that while wheat had decreased in price by 15 per cent., flour had increased by £2 per ton. That is the charge levelled by one hon. member against another hon. member sitting on the same side of the House.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: You know that the price of wheat has gone up.

Mr. LARCOMBE: The hon. member for Drayton is a practical farmer, and he knows as much about the farming industry as the hon. member for Warwick, and in saying that I am not speaking disparagingly of the hon. member for Warwick. The hon. member for Drayton said that while wheat was reduced in price to the extent of 15 per cent. flour was increased by £2 per ton.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: You know the price of wheat was increased.

Mr. LARCOMBE: I am giving the evidence adduced by one of the hon. member's own colleagues. The board, in carrying out their duties, entirely ignored the method which should have guided them in arriving at a determination. They should first of all have dealt with wholesale prices. That should have been the very foundation, the very basis, of any award. What is the good of fixing the retail price if you do not also fix the wholesale price? The retailer is just as much a victim of circumstance as the consumer, because if the wholesale merchant puts the price up on him, he must also put up the price or go out of the business. Hon. members on the other side have charged members on this side with having made an attack on the retailers. We have done nothing of the kind, and it is no good hon. members opposite trying to shift our charge against the wholesaler on to the small retailer. The hon. member for Burrum, in the course of his remarks, almost said that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company and other wholesalers were philanthropic institutions—that they had actually reduced prices since the war had occurred. He said that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company had shown their patriotism and loyalty to that extent. One has only to give that statement a little consideration to see how absurd it is. We know that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company have pursued those tactics previously. We know that prior to the taking of the referendum proposals, in 1911, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company reduced the price of sugar by £2 per ton; but, immediately the referendum proposals were defeated, they increased the price again by £3 per ton. That is the way they work. But the people of Australia saw through their dodge, and the result has been the return of Mr. Fisher and his colleagues, and the referenda proposals will again be submitted in the near future, and will be carried by a large majority. The hon. member for Townsville jibed and ridiculed members on this side and their industrial colleagues because we have not gone in for co-operative companies—because we have not started retail shops ourselves, and gone into industry generally. The workers have done a little in that direction in Brisbane and Rockhampton. In Rockhampton they have done splendid work, because when a rise of prices occurred there a few weeks ago the workers' store in Rockhampton refused to raise the prices. They were approached by a certain party and asked to go into a combine and increase the prices, but they refused to do so. We know that the workers generally are limited financially, and in other respects, and they cannot undertake the whole of the industries of the State at once. Indeed, it is not their function. It is the function of the State to do this work in order to protect the workers in times such as these, and to do it effectively. But the State are not doing it, and they are permitting the workers and the people generally to be fleeced in an outrageous way. I hope the Government will make some attempt to bring about a revision of the award of the Southern Board. It is a standing joke now. It is a monument of discredit to the Government, and unless they are going to revise it and make the board deal with the wholesale prices as well as retail prices, the work of the board is futile. The board are proceeding on unsound principles.

Mr. Larcombe.]

at present, and there will be no satisfaction to the public of Queensland while such a policy is continued.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN (*Kennedy*): I would like to say a few words before the debate is closed. I would not have risen at all had it not been for the remarks of the hon. member for Warwick about the price of wheat. We cannot, of course, control the price of wheat, because we get wheat from the other States. But, seeing that we grow sufficient wheat in Australia to supply the whole of Australia, it would be better if we had the matter under Federal control to fix the price of wheat for the whole of the States. Surely, in a time like we are going through at present, we should not increase the price of the commodities we grow for ourselves! We should not increase the price of wheat, and we should not increase the price of beef. Therefore, the sooner the Federal Parliament has some control over these things the better it will be for the people of the States. I am sure that the board appointed in the Southern division has not done the work it was primarily appointed to do; it has not met the trouble of the consumers at all. They should see that the wholesaler does not expect too high a price for the commodity he is dealing with, otherwise the retailer will be crushed between the wholesaler and the consumer, and in that way the retailer will be one of the worst sufferers.

Mr. RYAN (in reply): I think that the justification for moving this motion this afternoon has been amply shown by the discussion that has taken place upon it. I regret that a certain amount of heat has been introduced into it by hon. members opposite, and also a certain amount of party feeling.

The TREASURER: From your own side.

Mr. RYAN: Any impartial man who listened to me moving this motion would recognise that I presented my case from a non-party aspect. The very nature of the motion itself is such as to make it non-party. If I had wished to make this a party matter, I would have backed it by moving a direct vote of want of confidence in the Government. Instead of that, I have chosen the procedure which is provided by the Standing Orders, which lays down that the adjournment of the House may be moved for the purpose of eliciting debate. To my mind, the defence put up by the Premier and those who followed him on the other side was a weak one. In the main, our charge is that some of those whom the Government appointed to be members of these boards were unsuitable. I did not know at the start that the chairman of the Southern Board had been a member of the elections committee of the Premier.

The PREMIER: Not recently.

Mr. RYAN: Perhaps not recently, but I did not know that he had been a member of the hon. gentleman's election committee at all, and I desire to say that I think it was an indiscretion on the part of the hon. gentleman to appoint a person who had been a member of his election committee.

The PREMIER: Not a man of his qualifications.

[*Mr. Larcombe.*

Mr. RYAN: The hon. gentleman should have avoided the possibility of any political colour being given to any of these appointments, and I cannot conceive of anything that bears more in that direction. If we had been sitting on these benches, how would it be regarded by hon. members opposite if we had appointed a person who had been a member of my election committee?

The PREMIER: If he had the same qualifications as this gentleman, you could not do better.

Mr. RYAN: The hon. gentleman may hold that view, but, as a public man, I do not agree with him. I think special care should be taken to avoid appointment of members of your own election committee to important positions. Our main attack was directed at some of the appointments and at the method of procedure adopted by some of the boards. I notice that in the Central division the board in setting about its work pointed out that they were appointed under the Official Inquiries (Evidence) Act, and all witnesses were placed on their oath. That is not the procedure that has been adopted here, and I do not see that any steps have been taken to make proper inquiries with a view to ascertain what is the right basis upon which to fix prices. We have had the spectacle of wholesale merchants here proclaiming that they were the persons responsible for having the price of flour brought down. When I asked the hon. member for Murrumbidgee who was to blame for flour going up to £12 10s. a ton after the declaration of war, he said, "The millers." The hon. member for Warwick, who is associated with that particular industry, of course, naturally defends himself. My object in asking the hon. member for Murrumbidgee that question was to ascertain upon whose shoulders to place the blame. But we have the fact remaining that flour did jump to £12 10s. a ton and that it was taken down almost immediately. We are told that the fall was due to the merchants making an outcry against the increase in price, but I think the public of Queensland will quite understand that it was due to the matter being ventilated in this House, and to the fear that existed in the minds of those who were responsible for the rise that they would meet with public reprobation for their action. We have here an illustration of what is substantially Labour legislation being spoiled by Liberal administration.

The PREMIER: No.

Mr. RYAN: By not having sympathetic administration.

The PREMIER: Absolutely sympathetic.

Mr. RYAN: The hon. member for Burrumbidgee proclaimed that this discussion had had a most beneficial effect, because it showed that legislation of this kind was impracticable. I say it shows that the legislation is good, but the administration is bad. I know the Premier must defend his own administration.

The PREMIER: It defends itself.

Mr. RYAN: But the result shows that the action of the Government in regard to some of the appointments has been ill-advised.

The PREMIER: The result shows that the Government have appointed men who understand their business.

Mr. RYAN: It shows that prices have been raised beyond those prevailing, and I

understood that these boards were appointed to keep prices down, not to send them up. The hon. member for Maranoa is well acquainted with the whole business, and he says that the wholesale merchants put on 12½ per cent. on most of their lines.

The PREMIER: Imported lines.

Mr. RYAN: Well, even if they were imported lines.

The PREMIER: Which have not been dealt with yet.

Mr. RYAN: What reason had they for putting on 12½ per cent. if the goods were in stock when the war commenced? It has been conclusively shown to the country by this debate that hon. members on the other side are in favour of increasing prices.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: No.

Mr. RYAN: We are told, "If you are not pleased with that, start co-operative stores yourselves." We were told that about the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in connection with cane price boards when the hon. member for Burrum proclaimed the urgent necessity for such boards. This session they say that the remedy for the competition of big firms is co-operation. That is only side-stepping the issue. But perhaps the most regrettable part of the arguments of hon. members on the other side was their accusation that this motion was moved by me with the object of gaining political capital. The hon. member for Murilla and other members said that plainly.

Mr. MORGAN: And I repeat it.

Mr. RYAN: I am glad the hon. member does. They also say that there are many people in Queensland who are deceived by our attitude in this matter, and that the crushing defeat that the Liberal party received on Saturday last was occasioned by tactics such as I have adopted to-night.

The PREMIER: The position to-day and last Saturday is just the same.

Mr. RYAN: Just the same! We have been told that a majority of the people of Queensland have been deceived by the tactics of the Labour party in this matter. The position rather is that a majority of the people of Queensland are convinced by our actions and attitude that we have their interests at heart, and that we are not afraid to stand up in our place and fight for those who are not able to fight for themselves. But if hon. members on the other side would like to have my opinion as to another sort of tactics that contributed to the crushing defeat of the Liberal party on Saturday, I would remind them that it is because of the resentment of the people of Queensland and of Australia generally at the gross libels that were cast upon this party by accusing them of disloyalty.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. RYAN: Libelling the brave men who are out in the camp at Enoggera and in other parts of Australia, who are preparing to go forth and lose their lives for the people of Queensland and Australia.

Mr. MORGAN: They are not all socialists.

Mr. RYAN: The British flag—"the red, white, and blue"—was usurped by the Liberals on Saturday last.

The TREASURER: I saw you wearing it.

Mr. RYAN: I wore it, and I wore the Labour colours, too. I saw a placard, "Vote for Liberals and keep the flag flying," and all that sort of rubbish. That accounted a great deal for the crushing defeat of hon. members on the other side on Saturday, because the great majority of the people are fair-minded and right-thinking, and they know that there are no more loyal subjects of the King than the supporters of this party.

Mr. MORGAN: Don't claim that all those who are going to the front are socialists.

Mr. RYAN: Very many of them are (Hear, hear.) Indeed, I think the majority of them are supporters of this party, and I say all honour to them, no matter what party they belong to. (Hear, hear!) But what I do object to is that one party should claim the credit for all the loyalty, and should usurp the flag of the British Empire in order to try and gain a political end. I am glad they got their answer. The hon. member for Burrum, in elaborating his contention that we are endeavouring to gain political capital, commented upon the fact that we have the spectacle of the leader of the Opposition with price lists in his hands in this House. He said, why have we been sent here to govern the people? Those were the words he used. I am quite prepared to leave the verdict to the people, but I know of no more sacred duty of members of this House than the duty we have [9.30 p.m.] been engaged in this afternoon.

We must not forget that in these strenuous times there are many men who are employees who have not gone to the front in the war. There are other men who have gone to the front and left wives and families behind them, and there are many men who have not gone to the front and who are deprived of their employment, and who have wives and families depending on them. Those children have to take less for their breakfast in the morning if prices are higher.

Mr. MORGAN: It will be the Liberals who will look after their wives and families, not your party. (Opposition dissent.)

Mr. RYAN: I shall certainly not hesitate to do my duty on the floor of this House and voice our opinions as to what should be done for them. I have not heard one word from the time this motion was moved till now that condemned the action of certain parties in raising prices during this war. We all know that it has been done. We know the scathing remarks that fell from the Premier the first time the matter was raised—remarks for which I give him credit.

The PREMIER: And the boards are carrying that out.

Mr. RYAN: I only regret that they are not.

The PREMIER: They are!

Mr. RYAN: While I remain a member of this House I shall never hesitate to bring under public notice matters of this kind that I think require the attention of Parliament.

Mr. MORGAN: Mere heroics.

Mr. RYAN: It is not mere heroics; it is an absolute necessity. I know there are many women and children now who have to curtail

Mr. Ryan.]

their supplies on account of the high prices; and they are made of that stuff, and the men, too, are made of that stuff, that they bear without complaining. (Hear, hear!) If we shrink from our duty, if we are afraid to raise our voices here because we may offend this merchant or that, we would be false to the trust which was placed in us when the people sent us here.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Who is afraid of offending merchants? I am not, neither is anyone on this side.

Mr. RYAN: The deputy leader of the farmers' party did not think it worth his while to speak upon this motion. He remained cloaked in silence, but those hon. members who did speak were all in favour of the high prices, and condemned us for having accused certain men of being dishonest. I have many friends amongst the merchants and retailers of Queensland, and I think that they are as honest as any other section of the community; but there are some who, unfortunately, take advantage of strenuous times like these. This Bill was brought in to cope with this, and I think that the boards which have been appointed—I do not say all of them, but some of them—have not risen to the occasion and are not carrying out the purposes of the Act. The object sought to be attained by this motion has been attained. It was moved, as all such motions are moved, for the purpose of allowing discussion and debate, and drawing public attention to the matter. It is not, as a rule, put to a division, because the object is not to have a division of the House—not to adjourn the House—but to have a debate upon the matter to ventilate it. I trust that the result of the debate will be beneficial not only to the members of the board in seeing that they will do their duty a little better than they have been doing, but that it will be of some real benefit to the persons in whose interests it was moved. I ask leave to withdraw the motion.

The SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion moved by the leader of the Opposition be withdrawn?

HONOURABLE MEMBER: Hear, hear!

Motion withdrawn accordingly.

ROCKHAMPTON HARBOUR BOARD ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION.

The TREASURER (Hon. W. H. Barnes, *Bulimba*), in moving—

“That the House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to further amend the Rockhampton Harbour Board Act, 1895-1910.”

said: Briefly, I would like to explain that the Bill which I am now seeking leave to introduce makes provision for twelve members, one of whom is to be appointed by the Governor in Council, and the remaining eleven are to be appointed by the local authorities. Rockhampton will appoint four, North Rockhampton one, and then the other municipalities extending out will also have

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representation. Those nearer to Rockhampton will have it in the usual way as at a municipal election, and those removed some considerable distance away will appoint one of their number. The greatest number of votes which any ratepayer can have will be three. I think it is not necessary for me to make any further remarks, as what I have said covers pretty well the object of the Bill, which is practically on all-fours with some of the more liberal measures of this kind which have been introduced in the House.

Mr. ADAMSON: I had hoped that this Bill would have been one that would have shown that the Liberal Government—the democratic Government that they call themselves—were truly democratic. We would like to see this Bill made the best Bill in Queensland, and we were anxious to have the parliamentary franchise, not the ratepayers' franchise, and while there may be some people in Rockhampton who are content with that, the members on this side of the House, the Labour party in Rockhampton, and a great mass of the electors, are anxious that we should have the broadest franchise possible. When the time comes I will have something to say in relation to this matter. At present I would appeal to the Treasurer to consider as to whether he could not widen the scope of the Bill. I think we ought to have a broader franchise altogether. I do not think that payers of dues and a few of the ratepayers should say who should be on the board. I think that the consumer, who after all really pays all the charges, should have a great deal more say as to who shall represent the people of Rockhampton, and that the consumer in the Central district right out in the West should have a great deal more say as to who should be on the board. Of course, we welcome small mercies, and when we cannot get a full loaf we are prepared to take a half loaf, but if we can in any way liberalise the Bill the Treasurer can depend upon it that we will try to do so.

Question put and passed.

LIQUOR ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION.

The HOME SECRETARY, in moving—

“That the House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to amend the Liquor Act of 1912 in certain particulars.”

said: For the information of hon. members, I may say that the Bill that I propose to present will not in any way alter the policy of the legislation which was passed in 1912, but it has been found, as the result of experience in administration, that certain small amendments are necessary for the purpose of improving the administration of the Act. The Bill will contain certain amendments which have been already indicated, such as the one that has reference to accommodation in hotels which were already licensed prior to the passing of the Act. There will also be a provision in connection with the prohibition, which under the terms of the present Act exists in connection with the supply of liquor

to passengers in steamers on the high seas when making their passage from port to port. There is also an alteration made in connection with the bona fide traveller clause of the Act. The Bill will contain a proviso that a lodger may be a person arriving at an hotel on Sunday, who satisfies the licensee that he will become a bona fide lodger, and will remain there on the Sunday night, shall have the same privilege as a person who has been there on the Saturday night of being supplied with liquor during the hours limited for the supply of liquor to lodgers in hotels on Sunday. Probably, the most important amendment in the Bill is one which has been necessitated by the double dissolution of the Federal House of Representatives and the Senate.

Mr. THEODORE: Another crime of Joe Cook's.

The HOME SECRETARY: The Bill does not propose to deal with the matter from that point of view. The present Act provides that the first poll on the question of the reduction of the number of licensed houses shall take place at the next Senate election, and when the Act was passed it was anticipated that the next Senate election would be in the year 1916. Owing to the double dissolution, there will be no Senate election until the year 1917—that is, in the ordinary course of things. The contention of both those who were advocates of the liquor party and those who were advocates of the temperance party was that the poll should be held on the occasion of an election, so as to secure a representative vote. The Bill proposes that the period for the first reduction poll shall be the year 1917, when there will, in the ordinary course, be a Senate election; but it is further provided that, should a dissolution take place before that time and no Senate election be held, the Governor in Council shall choose a day in that year when the first reduction poll shall be taken.

Mr. RYAN: That is a very remote contingency.

The HOME SECRETARY: Quite so. As far as the poll on the question of total abolition is concerned, which, under the present legislation, is to take place in the year 1925, that date is preserved, and whether there is an election or not the poll will be taken in that year. Those are the principal amendments in the Bill.

Question put and passed.

FACTORIES AND SHOPS ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. W. H. Barnes, *Bulimba*): In moving the second reading of this small Bill I desire to state that it is, as hon. members are possibly aware, a measure dealing with the hours of business in barbers' shops. There is a special provision in section 50 of the present Act for barbers and others, and the result is that those people are not able to avail themselves of the ordinary weekly half-holiday in the same way as persons engaged in other businesses. According to that provision they

have to keep open on a Saturday afternoon, and close on a Thursday afternoon, so that they are debarred from having the advantage of the Saturday half-holiday which other persons enjoy. I think it will be admitted by hon. members that a holiday on Thursday afternoon is not equal to a holiday on Saturday afternoon, because on Thursday afternoon they cannot enjoy their holiday with other people. I know it will be argued that there are several reasons why this Bill should not be introduced, and I may anticipate some of the objections that may be advanced. I can well remember that when early closing was first introduced it was said that it would be impossible to carry it out, that the effect on the public would be disastrous, and that it would upset the conditions which were then prevailing.

Mr. THEODORE: That was said by members on your side.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Some of the Liberal members then associated with this side of the House went in for early closing before any Act of that kind was placed on the statute-book. However, as I have said, that objection was taken to the introduction of such legislation. Later on, as hon. members know, when it was proposed to close butchers' shops at an early hour it was said that that was impossible, and I know it will be argued that if barbers' shops are closed on a Saturday afternoon it will not be possible for men to get a shave.

Mr. RYAN: You are fighting a ghost.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: No; I am simply anticipating some arguments which will be brought forward. Hon. members opposite will probably claim by and by that this proposed amendment is due to their efforts. Anything that is good and in the interest of the worker they say they do, but anything that is bad is done by the other fellow. However, this Bill will give to the men who are engaged in this particular business the same facilities for obtaining a Saturday half-holiday as are given to other people, and I have therefore pleasure in moving that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr. RYAN: I have much pleasure in supporting the second reading of this Bill, and I am sorry that it has not been introduced sooner. I regret that the Minister, in introducing the second reading, should have expressed the opinion that there will be strong objections taken to it on well-known Tory grounds.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: I did not say such a thing.

Mr. RYAN: I want to assure the hon. gentleman and the hairdressers that the Labour party will see that the opposition to the measure will not be successful. We shall help the Treasurer through.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: He will be able to get through without your help.

Mr. RYAN: I do not know about that. What we are concerned with is the people intended to be benefited. We do not want to make political capital out of it at all, and I am only too delighted to think that the measure has been introduced, and I hope it will be speedily placed on the statute-book.

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Mr. BARBER (*Bundaberg*): Seeing that I have taken some active interest in this matter, I am pleased to see that the Hon. the Treasurer has brought the measure in. What I regret is that for the last twelve months the men have been practically done out of a boon which I think they could have had at least twelve months ago. Of course, I do not blame the Treasurer for that. The hon. member will remember that we had two or three deputations to him on the matter, and the method of meeting in conference was adopted, and it was found, after fixing up various agreements, that the whole thing fell through. And, in my opinion, the only practical way to settle this matter is by legislation, and I must congratulate the Treasurer—it is not often I do—upon carrying out the promise he made to a very large and representative deputation some time ago, that he would introduce legislation this session to deal with this matter. The whole system has been a very unsatisfactory one to a very large body of worthy employees. As a matter of fact, the Thursday afternoon half-holiday has not benefited them to any extent, because when there has been an ordinary half-holiday, say, on the Monday, these men, in the vast majority of cases, have had to work on the Thursday afternoon. I understand that even at this juncture, attempts have been made to get the men to arrange these matters by conference, to come to an agreement to work till half-past 1 o'clock on Saturday and till half-past 6 o'clock on ordinary days. But, as a matter of fact, anyone who understands this business at all knows that at 1 o'clock, if there are clients waiting in the shop, the men have to shave or cut the hair of these customers, with the result that they do not get away very often till half-past 1 or half-past 6 o'clock. I quite recognise that there will have to be a considerable amount of give and take on this matter. I do not want to say much on the question, because I believe that the measure will receive the support of, at any rate, a large proportion of the members of the Assembly, and I have very much pleasure in supporting the second reading.

Mr. BERTRAM: I want to say briefly that I am pleased to see that the Treasurer is giving effect to a promise that he gave some time ago to the Hairdressers' Union. I think the union are to be congratulated on the success of their agitation, and I hope, when the measure gets into the Committee stage, it will not be amended. I know that there is a movement in the direction of getting it amended in the way mentioned by the hon. member for Bundaberg—that is, to extend the time to half-past 1 o'clock on Saturday and to 6.30 p.m. on ordinary nights. I hope that no attempt made in that direction will be assisted by the Treasurer; I hope that he will stick to his original intention of passing the Bill as we have it before us. I do not want to take up the time of the House further than to express the hope that it will go through in that form, and to congratulate the Hairdressers' Union on the success of their efforts, and the Treasurer on having introduced it as we have it before us.

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 to-morrow.

The House adjourned at four minutes to 10 o'clock.

[*Mr. Barber.*]