

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 1919

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 23 OCTOBER, 1919.

The SPEAKER (Hon. W. Lennon, *Herbert*) took the chair at half-past 3 o'clock p.m.

CONSTITUTION ACT AMENDMENT
BILL, No. 2.

ASSENT.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt from His Excellency the Governor of a message conveying His Majesty's assent to this Bill.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS.

COTTON VALE RESUMPTION.

Mr. ROBERTS (*East Toowoomba*), in the absence of Mr. Morgan, asked the Secretary for Public Lands—

"1. From whom has the land been resumed for the Cotton Vale settlement for returned soldiers?"

"2. Compensation agreed upon?"

"3. Who negotiated the proposed resumption on behalf of the Government?"

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS (Hon. J. H. Coyne, *Warrego*) replied—

"1. Jesse Patrick Halloran, Joseph Kenten Thompson, Frederick Thomas Marsden, Edward Butler, George Butler, Samuel Meharg, Edward Richard William Denham, Gilbert Charles Butler, Stanford James Butler, Michael Richard Connell Fleming, Johann Joachim Friedrich Heinrich Hollmann, Bruce Jefferies, David Bridge, Edwin Garland, William Clarke Thompson, John Lionel Browne, Joseph Herman Christy Greer, Alfred John Southee, Maria Louisa Fleming (wife of M. R. C. Fleming), William Burton, Arthur Francis Kemp, Joseph McLucas, Thomas Henry Batterham, Ann Batterham, and William Knight.

"2. Notice of resumption has been given, but in no case has compensation yet been agreed upon or determined by the Land Court.

"3. No person negotiated the resumption. Action was taken by the department to satisfy a demand by returned soldiers for orchard land in that locality."

WORK FOR TOOWOOMBA UNEMPLOYED.

Mr. ROBERTS (*East Toowoomba*) asked the Secretary for Railways—

"In view of the considerable number of unemployed in the Toowoomba district, will he confer with the Engineer of Railways as to immediately offering employment on the earthworks necessary in connection with proposed new engine sheds, etc., at Toowoomba?"

The PREMIER (Hon. E. G. Theodore, *Chillagoe*) replied—

"This proposal is now before the Royal Commission on Public Works for investigation and report. Work cannot be commenced until report is tabled."

PRANKS OF "TICKLE TOE JOE."

Mr. PETRIE (*Toombul*) asked the hon. member for Mackay—

"Has his attention been called to a paragraph appearing in the 'Brisbane Courier,' dated 23rd October, headed 'Pranks at Mackay'?"

"2. If so, did he, as member of the district, approach the Commissioner of Police, with the view of getting the assistance of the police to help the citizens' vigilance committee being formed there for the purpose of securing the arrest of the man called 'Tickle Toe Joe' mentioned in that article?"

Mr. SMITH (*Mackay*) replied—

"1. Yes. I have read the paragraph referred to.

"2. I have not approached the Commissioner of Police, as suggested by the hon. member, as I have every confidence in Inspector Daly and his officers at Mackay, who are at all times zealous in the execution of their duties."

(Loud Government laughter.)

ADVERTISING IN NEWSPAPERS.

RETURN TO ORDER.

The following paper was laid on the table:—

"Return to Order made by the House on 13th August last, on the motion of Mr. Petrie, giving the names of newspapers receiving Government advertisements."

PAPER.

The following paper, laid on the table, was ordered to be printed:—

"Annual report of the Commissioner of Public Health."

LIQUOR ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(*Mr. Bertram, Marce, in the chair.*)

The HOME SECRETARY (Hon. W. McCormack, *Cairns*) moved—

"That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to further amend the Liquor Act of 1912 in certain particulars."

Mr. VOWLES (*Dalby*): I am assuming that there is no further information to be given by the Minister in addition to that he gave on the previous stage?

The HOME SECRETARY: You got practically the whole of it.

Mr. VOWLES: I shall wait till the Bill comes before us, and then give it close study.

Question put and passed.

The House resumed. The CHAIRMAN reported the resolution, which was agreed to.

FIRST READING.

On the motion of the HOME SECRETARY, the Bill was read a first time.

The second reading was made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

PROFITEERING PREVENTION BILL.

SECOND READING—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

Mr. WINSTANLEY (*Queenton*): I desire to make a few observations on this Bill before it goes through its second reading. Many speeches have already been made upon it, and apparently a good deal of diversity of opinion exists, both with regard to the existence of profiteering and the prevention of it. There are members on the other side who tell us that no such thing as profiteering exists, and that therefore there is no necessity to attempt to prevent it. I do not think that anybody who goes about with his eyes and ears open can be under any misapprehension upon the subject—can have any doubt as to whether it exists or not. I am certainly one of those who think that profiteering does exist to a very large extent, not only in Queensland, but also practically the wide world over, and I also think it can be dealt with. What this Government are endeavouring to do in the Bill before us—on which the Minister made an exceptionally fine speech and gave a vast amount of information—is to deal with it, and I certainly think that an honest attempt is going to be made to deal with profiteering, as it exists in Queensland, and as we know it at the present time.

The law of supply and demand has been introduced in this connection—has been discussed repeatedly—and we are told that the reason for high prices at the present time is the scarcity of the goods for which high prices are charged. If that were so we all know that high prices would be inevitable. I do not think that anybody on this side of the House is so ill-acquainted with the law of supply and demand as not to know that when things are scarce they cannot be cheap, but, on the other hand, we know perfectly well that they are not always cheap when they are plentiful. That is where the difficulty arises. There is such a thing as a natural scarcity of an article, and there is also such a thing as an artificial scarcity of that article, and it is with the artificial scarcity of commodities that the Government, at any rate, are anxious to deal. On this particular point President Wilson has had something to say, because profiteering is not confined to any country or State. It has been rampant practically all over the wide world during the last four or five years, and addressing Congress on it President Wilson says—

“The prices the people are paying for everything it is necessary for them to use in order to live are not justified by a shortage in supply, either present or prospective, and in many cases are artificially created by vicious practices which ought to be immediately checked by law. They constitute a burden upon us which is the more unbearable because we know that it is wilfully imposed by those who have the power, and that it can by vigorous public action be greatly lightened and be made to square with the actual conditions of supply and demand.

“Some of the methods by which these prices are produced are illegal, some of them criminal, but others have not yet been brought under the law, and should be dealt with at once by legislation.”

And what President Wilson points out as being the cause in America, as well as in other countries, is appropos of Queensland and

the other Australian States, and for that reason the Government are going to make an attempt to deal with those persons, who are nothing else, in some instances, than criminals, and are going to try, so far as lies in their power, to control prices and keep them, at any rate, within something like the bounds of reason and decency. (Hear, hear!)

The question of the cost of production has also been pretty freely discussed, and when the hon. member for Drayton deals with the cost of production he seems to think that the cost of production in the Drayton electorate, or, at any rate, on the Darling Downs, should be the cost of production for practically the whole of Australia. But the cost of production is not decided by the cost in one particular district, particularly when it is suffering from the disabilities of drought or some other disaster, but it is decided by practically the average cost of production the wide world over, which means that prices are fixed by London parity, as is the case with most of our dairy produce. So it is a very one-eyed and small view to take to say that because the cost of production is as high as or even something over the selling price, that price should be maintained or raised when the cost of production is lower in other places where conditions are much better. It is certain that whilst the cost of production of dairy produce on the Darling Downs for the last year or two may have been over the market price, there nevertheless are other places where people—if they have not been amassing fortunes—have been doing exceptionally well and reaping exceptionally large incomes.

Now, in view of the cry we have heard from various prominent individuals regarding the need for more production—Mr. Lloyd George has impressed upon people in the old country the need there is for more production, and William Morris Hughes has taken up the same stand in Australia—it seems a passing strange thing that while there is the need—and, no doubt, there is—for increased production, the production that has taken place should not be looked after and conserved better than it is at the present time. I read an article quite recently in one of the Brisbane papers, headed “Profiteering Gone Mad.” It points out the conditions that exist in some countries where the need for increased production is infinitely greater than it is even in Australia at the present time. The writer of this article says—

“The American army in France is left, at the end of the war, with 100,000 motor vehicles, mostly little worn, with huge stores of unused provisions, clothing, and boots. All these things are bitterly needed by would-be French buyers. The motors, in particular, would be invaluable in helping to set industry going again and in supplying the other transport urgently needed in the devastated districts. The Americans, who have no marine transport to spare, are willing to sell. But the French motor manufacturers, though gorged, like those of other belligerent countries, with war profits, have not been ashamed to procure from the French Government a veto on any sale of the American goods to private French purchasers, and a refusal by the French Government to buy them itself. Accordingly the motor vehicles are now being burnt wholesale, that the war

Mr. Winstanley.]

profiteers of the French motor trade may exploit to the full the distresses of their countrymen, and incidentally inflict a serious loss on France's American allies. The same spirit is at work in England, where groups of traders already distended with war profits have been steadily intriguing to keep up, for their further enrichment, the extortionate war prices which, more than anything else, render a violent attempt at revolution possible. With those overfed 'caterpillars of the Commonwealth' at one extreme, and a large number of believers in the magic virtue of mere destructivism at the other, the countries which are not already in a state of civil war combined with starvation will be lucky if they pull through.

"From other sources we get added details. Millions of pounds' worth of army boots, clothing, tarpaulins, bedding, and provisions all sent up to the heavens in smoke that reaches for 50 miles, destroyed at the dictates of French capitalism, destroyed at the instance of a gang which has the colossal impudence to chide the working classes for not producing enough. 'Increased production,' cry these condemned rascals; 'increased production can alone save the State from the debts of war; increased production alone can bring reduced costs of living and save civilisation.'

"And even as they cry, they order the destruction of millions of pounds' worth of wealth of which the world is urgently in need.

"The British Government is on the same tack. Four thousand damaged British motor-cars, says the 'Daily News' (20th June, 1919), were deliberately burned in a bonfire near Wissant.

"They destroy in order to maintain their profits. It is capitalism, naked and unshamed."

It does seem a strange thing, in view of these facts, that people who want to benefit personally can bring about a state of affairs that things which are actually needed by the people in those particular countries are allowed to be destroyed, because they would interfere with their individual profits and individual benefit. Yet it is an absolute fact that the same thing has taken place repeatedly, perhaps on a smaller scale and, perhaps, with other commodities. Wherever the price is desired to be kept at one particular level it has been a common thing, even in Australia, to destroy products rather than put them on the market at the risk of getting a lower price than they were getting. As a matter of fact, it used to be a common practice in Brisbane, when fish would not fetch the average ruling price, to dump it back into the river rather than give it to the people at a price which they could afford to pay. What has been done in that particular instance has been done all round, practically the wide world over, to keep up prices to the level at which they were during the war. It seems to me essential that something should be done at the present time to try and remedy this state of affairs and to see whether, after all, there is not somebody trying to levy blackmail on the community by charging prices which they have no right to ask or to get. I have heard a good deal lately about where the workers are robbed. It has been said over

[Mr. Winstanley.

and over again that the present industrialists are organising at the point of production, and that is where the workers are robbed. It may be quite true in many instances that the workers are robbed at the point of production—robbed on the job—but that is by no means the only place, for the simple reason that they are robbed practically all along the line from the point of production to the point of consumption. Everybody who turns over the products which the workers produce wants his share—sometimes more than a fair or reasonable share—and the consequence is that by the time the products reach the consumer—who, after all, in many instances, is the producer—they are increased in value and cost until they are practically beyond his reach. For that reason it seems to me there are good, solid grounds for the Bill that has been introduced, in order that efforts may be made to ascertain what is the correct value of some of these things, and where more than the value is being charged, to bring to book the people who are trying to charge these values and extract from the community that which really does not belong to them; at any rate, to get these things to the people at something like a fair and reasonable price. Evidence has been given of the fact that every balance-sheet and every return of every large company shows that during the war period they have made profits which were beyond the bounds both of right and reason, far beyond anything they made previous to the war. Yet we are told by people that nobody ought to make exceptional profits. When the war first commenced we were told that nobody in Queensland desired to make more than what was a fair and average pre-war price. Our experience and observation have taught us that such has not been the case. When everybody else has made his profit—when the producer and the middlemen who have turned it over, and the shippers have all had their cut out of it—in a great many instances in isolated Queensland towns of fair size and a fair amount of importance, it is a practice that takes place regularly for the retailers to get together every fortnight—sometimes oftener than that if the necessity arises—and fix the prices at which they will sell practically all the standard lines and some other lines which are outside standard. It is more than any individual dare do, to sell below the price they fix. Sometimes these prices may be fair and reasonable. At other times they are neither fair nor reasonable. On one or two occasions recently men who have been able to buy at a fair price and wanted to sell at a fair price have taken it upon themselves to do so. They got themselves into serious trouble. Action was taken there on similar lines to those decided upon by the Brisbane merchants—revelation of which was made in this House. They were placed on the black list and every difficulty and obstacle placed in the way of their getting supplies from merchants after having taken that stand. It is a common occurrence, practically all over Queensland, for people to do this kind of thing. It seems to me there is ample need for a review at the present time of the methods that are being adopted by some of these people, and some attempt made to bring them to book and see that the people get the necessities of life—for, after all, that is what they are dealing with—at something like a fair and reasonable rate. Practically every country in the world

has to take some steps at the present time to deal with this particular subject. Some criticism has been passed upon the Bill, and comparisons have been made with a Bill introduced in 1914 at the commencement of the war. In the British House of Commons a Bill has been introduced and passed dealing with this particular subject, but the people who have discussed it are by no means satisfied with it. One leading London newspaper writes—

“After shattering criticism by members of all parties, the Profiteering Bill passed through all its stages in the House of Commons in the record time of four days. Nobody expects that it will have much effect, but everybody feels that something must be done immediately. So this temporary, stop-gap device is adopted by general consent, but is limited in its operation to six months. The speeches of the House were of more value than the Bill, for they demonstrated that members are really roused to a sense of the scandal. No remark was more significant than that of Lord Winterton, who declared emphatically that no one in the country ought to be richer as the result of the war. Unfortunately, it is rather late in the day to discover this principle. One’s first impression of the Bill is confirmed. The only man it is likely to penalise is the retailer who tries to help himself to a small share of the plunder after the big dealers and speculators have had their picking. But we are promised in the autumn another Bill dealing with trusts, which will be getting nearer the source of anti-social profiteering. Whether, however, the trusts can be successfully dealt with except by arrangement with other Governments, is doubtful, as the great trusts have international ramifications. We are affected, for instance, by the monopoly of the ‘Big Five,’ the Chicago packing firms, which have nearly succeeded in controlling the food supply of the United States. These firms hold interests in 762 companies, producing or dealing in 775 commodities, and have a grip on the market in regard to other things besides food. They can, for instance, regulate the price of boots through their control of hides. The trust is a hydra-headed monster, very difficult to destroy. But there is one method by which our Government could long ago have steadied prices. It could have removed the embargoes on imports, as it is going to do on 1st September.”

Now it is quite evident that they are not expecting very great results, for the simple reason that the Bill is only going to be operative for six months, and it is neither comprehensive enough nor wide enough to get over the forces that are at work. The same thing applied to the Bill which was introduced here in 1914. Something has been said in reference to it. It was pointed out by one speaker that the Government, at the present time, had all the power needed to deal with the situation as they find it. The Bill which was introduced in 1914 was neither comprehensive enough nor wide enough in its ramifications to do anything like justice to the position as we find it at the present time. As a matter of fact, members who were sitting on this side of the House at that time supporting the Government frankly admitted, when the Bill was

being discussed, that it would not do very much in the direction indicated. Mr. Archer—hon. member for Normanby—discussing that Bill said—

“This is not a price-fixing measure at all.”

He also said—

“Ninety-nine per cent. of the traders are patriotic enough, or decent enough, not to take advantage of the war.”

Now, that was a very fine sentiment to express, and I have no doubt Mr. Archer believed it when he expressed it, but experience has taught us that practically 99 per cent. have taken advantage of the opportunity, and made the very most they could out of the commodities with which they have been dealing while the war was going on. Mr. Forsyth, the hon. member for Murrumba, agreed with the Bill and expressed the opinion that prices all round would not be increased. The hon. member for Carnarvon, Mr. Gunn, said

[4 p.m.] that the graziers would be agreeable to accept prices for their stock fixed on the pre-war rates. I have no doubt that the hon. member believed that statement when he made it. I well remember that Mr. Booker also made that statement, but I was not aware that the hon. member for Carnarvon also made it. I turned up “Hansard” and read the speeches that were made on that occasion when I noticed what the hon. member for Carnarvon had to say on that question.

Mr. GUNN: I would like to get pre-war prices for my cattle now—for fat stock.

Mr. WINSTANLEY: Prices now are greater than they were in pre-war times. It is no use sending cattle in if they have got no fat on them, but, speaking generally, prices to-day are very much higher than they were in pre-war days. Prices are much higher now than they were five years ago. If prices were fixed the grower would know what he was getting for his stock, and it would be better for everyone. On that occasion the hon. member for Warwick dealt with the wheat aspect, and he said that the price of wheat landed in London was 5s. 3½d. per bushel, and at that price it was equal to 4s. 6d. per bushel in Queensland. That meant that freight from Australia to England was 9½d. per bushel. We have been told that the price of wheat in London at the present time is 9s. 2d. per bushel, and I believe it is more than that. It has gone up to 10s., while in Australia the price is 4s. 9d. When people point out the difference in price they are told that the difference is in the freight between here and the old country. In pre-war days the freight was 9d. per bushel, but, according to those figures, the freight is now 4s. 9d. per bushel, practically equal to the value of the wheat in Australia. Yet we are told there is no profiteering and that no one would take advantage of the people. We know from experience that whenever there has been a chance of getting a bigger price that they have always availed themselves of the opportunity of doing so. We know that a lot of people took all they could from the people whenever the opportunity offered to do so. There was no opportunity lost so far as they were concerned. It did not matter where it was, either at the war, or with those who were left behind, the consequences were the same and increased prices had to be paid. Some criticism has been levelled at this Bill by the Brisbane

Mr. Winstanley.]

newspapers. The Government do not object to their Bills being criticised. But they expect to get something like fair criticism. I read an article in a Brisbane newspaper the other day, headed "Profiteering and Humbug." It said—

"Mr. Ryan recently characterised a proposal of the Federal Government as 'transparent humbug.' Adapting that phrase to a Bill now before the Legislative Assembly, it can be said without any exaggeration that no greater piece of 'transparent humbug' has ever been foisted upon the community than is to be found in the provisions of the State Government's Profiteering Prevention Bill. It is not only transparent humbug,"

etc. If there is any transparent humbug at all it is in the article which was written in that paper in reference to prices and in reference to profiteering. Then the article continues—

"The old Latins had a motto that 'whom the Gods wish to destroy they first make mad.'"

If that is true, then there are some leader writers in Brisbane who are not far off destruction, because the writer of this article must have been made mad. Then it goes on—

"and either that applies to the Government in its conception of the Profiteering Prevention Bill, or the Bill as for purely spectacular and propaganda purposes, designed to win the support of those who are finding it hard to make ends meet, and who do not understand the cause of high prices, or the factors that have caused the unprecedented increases throughout the world."

It further says—

"Five years ago the world held accumulated stocks of everything needed by civilised people. Then came the war, when probably 50,000,000 persons, men and women, were withdrawn from ordinary production. When the armistice was signed the greater part of the world was on the verge of famine, and not one country in the world could supply its normal requirements; in fact, recent calculations show that more than 100,000,000 people in Europe must depend wholly on imports for some months. The unprecedented world shortage, and the insatiable demand for commodities, fixed the prices that are ruling."

In reference to that statement, that five years ago the world had accumulated stocks of everything needed by civilisation, that is absolutely incorrect, because in normal times the stocks of foodstuffs accumulated would not last more than three months. We know that immediately we begin to store up goods that they deteriorate and have to be destroyed. We really are living from hand to mouth, and to say that we stored up goods in pre-war times is absolute rubbish. As a matter of fact, if production ceased we would be starving at the end of three months. The same thing applies to clothes. If there are no more clothes made, then at the end of six months we would be naked or else in rags. At any rate, we know for a fact that if there are no more clothes made, then at the end of six months the people would be without clothes altogether. The same thing applies to everything that was used during the war. One of the most striking things in connection with the war is that, in spite of the fact that 50,000,000 people were withdrawn from

ordinary production, and put into the battlefield or making munitions, that the rest of the community were able to produce enough during the five years of war to keep the whole of the people in food and clothing, and keep the army supplied with munitions. So is it any wonder that people should think these times that we should be able to supply ourselves with food and clothing, shelter, and some luxuries of life without having to work ten or twelve hours a day to do it. If we had anything like scientific organisation of labour, and the drones of society were made to do their share in production, then we should be able to get it cheaper than at the present day. When the armistice was signed we were told that there was no country in the world able to supply itself. If that were true, where would any country be able to import from? How can you import from countries that cannot supply themselves with their own needs? Although it is twelve months since the armistice was signed, if trade had been allowed to go on there is not a country in the world that would not have been decently fed and clothed. For five years the producers and the flower of the manhood of many countries in the world have been doing something else besides producing. They have been destroying, and they have been fed and clothed all the time. There is a lot to be learned from the war, and the production that took place during the war. When we consider the large number withdrawn from production and now released, it makes us think that prices should be cheaper than they are at the present time. There is food for reflection for the workers generally in connection with the war and the state of things to-day. It is only right that we should get back to pre-war conditions. It seems to me that at the present time the world has economically and industrially lost its equilibrium, and everything is upside down. It seems as if wages are chasing prices with little chance of catching them. We want to get things back on to something like a decent foundation. We can do that by fixing wages and fixing the cost of living as well. There is little benefit in increasing wages if the increase will not purchase any more than before the wages were increased. Until we get matters on a firm and equitable basis we are not going to reduce the cost of living. While the Bill before us at the present time may not do everything, it will go a long way towards mitigating the present evil. The Bill is a good one, as far as it goes, and it will deal with retailers and everyone else. It will deal with trusts and combines, and will enable prices to be fixed. When this Bill is in operation I am satisfied that it will do some good for the people and also for the producers of this State.

Mr. SWAYNE (*Mirani*): Before this question goes through I would like to say that it is one that should be treated from a strictly non-party standpoint. There is just as intense a desire on the part of those on this side to put a stop to profiteering and exploiting the consumer as there is on the other side of the House. If through any misfortune or stress of circumstances that occurred during the war people are made to suffer, then members on this side are just as willing to remedy that as members opposite. Why should it not be so? Members on this side are essentially men of the people. We have all had to work our way up and most of us have been engaged in manual

[*Mr. Winstanley.*]

labour, and have had to battle against adverse circumstances. We feel keenly when the necessities of life are forced up higher and higher than they were before, and we are just as desirous of coping with the real evil as members on the other side are. I regret that so much party capital has been made out of it by members on the other side. Not only have they failed in the attempt to prove the need for this particular measure, but they have also wandered off into all sorts of innuendoes against hon. members on this side, inferring that we are here to represent particular interests, and all that sort of thing. I would like to say it is not true. At the same time seeing that all along they possessed very ample powers to deal with this question, if they were in earnest, how is it they have not availed themselves of those powers, which in the control of prices are as ample as those which this Bill seeks to give them. I do not wish to travel over the ground which the hon. member for Nundah did very fully, but I have here the opinion of the Minister in charge of the Bill, and I notice that he contends while dealing with the exigencies of the position—

“The regulation under the War Precautions Act assuming Federal control over price-fixing was issued by the Federal Government. While we were in power we were able to deal with price-fixing until the regulations under the War Precautions Act were put into force. The regulations issued by the Federal Government covered about fifty articles.”

Now, as far as I understand it, we certainly have not the power to conflict with the Federal authorities in any of our legislation where they also possess power; but I take it that we can legislate in the same arena as they can, so long as we do not conflict with their legislation. For instance, if the Federal Government under their Act fixed the price of a certain article at £1, and we thought it was too much, I take it that, under the powers that undoubtedly lay in our hands, there was nothing to prevent us fixing the price at 18s. 6d., because the Federal authority does not say its price must be £1, all it says it must not be over. I have here a book by W. L. Wilkinson—an author whom the Minister in charge of the Bill already quoted—on “Trusts and Combinations.” The work I have here is upon “The Regulation of Prices.” On page 28 it says—

“The Control of Trade Act, passed by the Queensland Legislature, for the purpose of controlling the prices of commodities within the State, was almost identical in terms with that passed by the New South Wales Parliament. Whilst the full title of the Act included the words ‘during war,’ no other reference is made as to when the Act shall expire. Furthermore, no limitation was placed on the administration of the Act as far as the nature of the controlled ‘goods’ was concerned, it being merely provided that ‘goods’ included all ‘foodstuffs, goods, chattels, or things whatsoever.’”

I have here a copy of this Act passed by the Denham Government, which says: That they have power to appoint boards, and which is laid down in the Bill before us. The Act says—

“Each board from time to time in and for the district for which they are appointed—

(a) Shall inquire into and report to

the Chief Secretary as to what prices should be the highest selling prices for any goods or kinds of goods under this Act;

(b) May in any inquiry or report deal with the prices of any goods or kinds of goods under this Act, whether included in a previous report or not; and

(c) May in any report specify different selling prices for the same goods or kinds of goods, having regard to—

(i.) The different qualities thereof;

or

(ii.) The sale or supply thereof, wholesale or retail; or

(iii.) The sale or supply thereof under differing terms and conditions; or

(iv.) Any other matter which the board think fit to consider.”

Then it goes on—

“Any person who—

(a) Sells or supplies or offers for sale or supply, any goods at a price higher than the declared price thereof for any such sale or supply; or

(b) Refuses to sell (except at a price higher than the declared price thereof for any such sale or at all) any goods—

(i.) Which he is entitled to sell and—”

Mr. HARTLEY: What has that to do with the question before the House?

Mr. SWAYNE: I am showing that you had the powers all along.

Mr. HARTLEY: Where does the War Precautions Act come in?

Mr. SWAYNE: It goes on—

“(i.) Which are in excess of what are required for the use of himself and his dependents for a period of three months from the date of the refusal,

“is guilty of an offence against this Act.

“Any person who commits an offence against this Act is liable to a penalty not exceeding five hundred pounds, and to be imprisoned for any period not exceeding six months.”

There is no doubt, in the face of that, as to the powers that the Government possessed to deal with this evil during the whole time they have been in power.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: All those powers have been superseded on account of Federal action.

Mr. SWAYNE: Let me draw your attention to this, Mr. Speaker: Only the other day the Minister for Railways considered the price fixed by the Federal tribunal for coal as being too high. You will remember that early in July last the Commonwealth authorities, acting upon the recommendation of the shipping controller, issued an order, under the war precautions coal regulations, directing that the rates of wages to miners should be increased, and so on, and regulating the price of coal. The Queensland Government, although that was Federal action, were not prepared to abide by it, and appointed their own Royal Commission just the same as they might under their own Control of Trade Act have appointed their own Royal Commission to deal with anything they considered profiteering. So the only assumption one can come to is that they are keeping this Bill for the elections. For a matter of four years

Mr. Swayne.]

they were quite content that the people of Queensland should be exploited while they had ample power to deal with the matter. I have here the opinion of Mr. Ryan himself that regarding any action of the Federal Government that concerned them, they were free to deal with it. Yet, while they had this power to cope with an evil which they say has cost the people of Queensland so much, they wilfully and criminally neglected to use it so that just on the eve of an election they could use it as an election cry.

Mr. WHITFORD: Why don't you confine yourself to the truth.

Another GOVERNMENT MEMBER interjected.

Mr. SWAYNE: I cannot very well hear the interjections, Mr. Speaker, but I am not going to take any notice of them. I can quite understand that honourable members opposite do not like what I am saying, and will do their utmost, if they can, to prevent me from speaking; but I am not going to be drawn off the track. Let me draw your attention to what our late Premier, Mr. Ryan, says regarding the State's power in this matter. I am quoting now an extract from a Brisbane daily paper of 5th August. It says—

"The Premier (Mr. Ryan) said yesterday afternoon that he had had a discussion during the day with certain of the coal profiteers, and he understood that they were having a meeting to-day. 'I made clear to them,' Mr. Ryan said, 'the necessity for keeping up the output of coal from the mines on the terms outlined by me to Mr. Cleghorn—'

Mr. SWAYNE: Not outlined by the Commonwealth. It goes on—this is most noteworthy—

"The Government does not admit its liability to comply with the recent Commonwealth order fixing the price of coal. The Government has, however, appointed a Commission"

And so on. Does not that show that they had ample power, and that their contention that they had not is untrue, and that just the same as they interfered in the price of coal they could have interfered in the price of foodstuffs, clothing, or any other article they may think has been the subject of profiteering? I sometimes wonder whether this cry has not been exaggerated all round. I am quite aware that it is very difficult to account for some of the prices that have been charged—more particularly as regards clothing and tools, except that there is profiteering. For instance, in the matter of clothes—particularly ladies' clothes—you go down the street, and in the shop windows you see flimsy pieces of silk marked at anything from 70s. to 90s. You will also see light shoes, not weighing more than a couple of ounces, at anything from 40s. to 50s. No rise in the price of leather can explain such an exorbitant—and I do think it is exorbitant—rise in price. Again, as regards tools. I saw a jack-plane that you could have bought for 7s. or 8s. before the war marked at 20s. We all know that high-class steel has gone up very much in price, but still in that particular tool the high-class steel would not weigh more than 3 or 4 oz., so that it does not explain the unduly large increase in the price of that particular article. Still, taking all that into consideration, I sometimes think that this charge of unduly rising prices has been exploited. Just as some of the tradesmen themselves have exploited the public, politicians are trying to take advantage of any

evils that may have arisen in that regard and are exploiting the capitalists for party purposes.

I have pointed out, however, that the Government have had ample power to deal with the matter, and I have quoted our late Premier, Mr. Ryan, as bearing out my contention that they had ample power to deal with this evil whenever it arose. I notice, under cover of this, that an attack has been made upon companies generally. I do not think in legislation of that kind that it is for the general good that we should be influenced by untrue statements; neither do I think it is for the good of Queensland, or the good of the workers themselves, that it should go forth to the world that anything in the shape of a company is an obnoxious animal in Queensland. I notice that the Minister dealt largely with the companies. I am quite at one with the Government in any effort that they might make to deal with either individuals or companies where there is undue exploiting; at the same time I do not think it is a good thing that we should act upon incorrect opinion and upon statements that are wrong. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company was brought largely into the discussion. Regarding certain actions that the company are taking now under another law, I am very much opposed to them—(Government laughter.)—and I think it is a reflection on the Government that passed the Regulation of Cane Prices Act, and the Government that passed the amendment, that they now want to contract themselves out of. However, no matter how reprehensible the company may be in that regard, I do not think that charges made under other headings will hold water, and nothing is to be gained by saying [4.30 p.m.] ing what is not true. But, when you see such lapses as that makes you think that something of the kind might happen on the other side. However, no matter how responsible the company may be in that regard, I do not think that charges on the other hand will hold water, and nothing is to be gained by making them. It only misleads us and leads to disappointment if we legislate upon such premises if we find out afterwards that they are incorrect. We have heard a great deal, for instance, regarding the watering of shares. I have watched the company very closely—I am interested in the industry as a canegrower—and whilst I am just as alive to their shortcomings as anybody else, I would remind hon. members that shares of the last issue were paid to only £5, and the shareholders had to put in £15 per share as fresh capital. Yet hon. members opposite, when on the subject of share-watering, and the authorities they quote, would ignore that fact. They very often deny it, and if they admit it they reverse the figures. I have heard it said that the shareholders paid only £5 and they got £15. That sort of thing is not true, and it is no use proceeding along those lines. Something has been said regarding the shipping companies and the large profits they have made. I have been following matters very closely, and I think I am right in saying that for some considerable time any profits that have been made out of our interstate shipping—I am not talking of overseas shipping, in which case the companies if they have made high profits have nevertheless done so on British Blue Book rates—have been under the control of a Government elected by the people of Australia,

{Mr. Swayne.

and have gone into Commonwealth revenue. The other day the companies increased their rates by 10 per cent., but at the same time it must be admitted that on only one occasion during the period of the war did they increase them, and then by 15s. or 16s. between here and Sydney. Considering all the circumstances in connection with the "flu" epidemic and the strike and so on, we must admit that recent happenings have meant a lot out of their pockets, as they had to bear the cost as well as increases in wages. In regard to the Vacuum Oil Company, we find that their profits have been the subject of inquiry in South Australia, and a different aspect has been put on the question from that which was created by the inquiry in Sydney. Instead of profits of 70 or 80 per cent., which was there thought to exist, President Brown, of the South Australian Arbitration Court, is satisfied that they are a great deal less than that. I have no wish to labour this question, but I think it is only in the interests of the truth that it should be known that President Brown, who has been a good friend of hon. members opposite in the past, says—

"We have the Interstate Commission's report which, if I may say so with due deference, does not appear to go on very businesslike lines."

Then, again, according to an extract from a Sydney paper referring to a debate in the Commonwealth Parliament, we find that the following is said with regard to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company:—

"Some figures which were quoted by Mr. James Ashton the other day throw a great deal of light on this matter. Those figures were collected some years ago, but although they may have slightly varied since then as to particulars, the totals remain, no doubt, about the same. Mr. Ashton found that there were 1,942 shareholders in the sugar company, and of these 1,058 drew annual dividends of £50 and under, and only 100 of the shareholders drew annual dividends of over £500."

I am just quoting this to show that many of these companies which are being used to justify all sorts of wild statements are not at all as they are depicted, and that many small people are shareholders, although I say that there is no doubt that there are times when they abuse the position. I have mentioned one instance where I think the Colonial Sugar Refining Company are abusing their position, but that instance is quite irrelevant to the subject we have before us to-day.

Mr. COLLINS: You are a good apologist for the profiteer.

Mr. SWAYNE: I am just as much against the profiteer as the hon. member. I have my own little farm to keep going, and I feel any increase in the price of provisions or implements just as much as—probably more than—hon. members opposite. At the same time I do not think that we should mislead ourselves by allowing a false impression on these matters to prevail.

So far as the fixation of prices is concerned, ever since this party have been in power they have had ample power, as Mr. Ryan himself said in regard to the action concerning coal, and the Federal Government's similar powers in the same sphere did not concern them one iota. When they

wished to keep down the price of coal for themselves they were quite able to do it, and just in the same way could they have kept down the price of food or clothing or anything else if they wished to do so. Before I leave that question, I would like to draw attention to the fact that fixation of prices is no new thing, and that the experience of the past is such as to show that unless the matter is handled very, very carefully, the future state of affairs will be worse than the present. I have here a book by the same author as that which the Minister quoted so extensively in introducing the Bill, "The State Regulation of Prices in Australia," by H. L. Wilkinson. He points out—

"The historical record of the results of directly and indiscriminately fixing prices by law leads one to the conclusion that it has lamentably failed to effect the purpose for which the legislation was designed, viz., restricting the rise in the prices of commodities. But how far it is to a limited degree efficacious, and to what extent modern conditions of trade will enable a different result to be obtained are questions which require the deepest consideration."

That is all I ask—the deepest consideration and inquiry before any action is taken lest worse befall us. The Government evidently have recognised that, because they have not used the powers in their possession for something like four years. This author proceeds—

"Probably the best known case in history of fixing the prices of commodities in a civilised State is the effort of the Roman Emperor Diocletian in 301 A.D. He issued an edict fixing prices, not only of commodities, but also of wages. There are no complete historical records either of the circumstances which brought forth this edict or the result of its operation."

Then he goes on to give a list of articles that were dealt with and says—

"Notwithstanding the fact that death and deportation were the penalties for selling at higher rates than those mentioned in the edict, its observation throughout the Roman Empire was not very general. According to most reports, the actual results were, however, disastrous, as the restrictions on freedom of trade brought about disturbances in the ordinary channels of food supply, and many traders were ruined. But the most far-reaching effects were the detrimental influence that the edict had on production within the Empire and the restrictions it placed on the importation of supplies from abroad."

That is the point I want to make—that at the present juncture when it is said that over 100,000,000 people in Europe are practically without visible means of support, we should not take any drastic action which would discourage the producer. The same author also says on page 100—

"When he (the Emperor Diocletian) had brought on a state of exceeding high prices by his different acts of injustice, he tried to fix, by law, the prices of articles offered for sale. Thereupon, for the veriest trifles much blood was shed, and, out of fear, nothing was offered for sale, and the scarcity grew much worse, until, after the death of many persons, the law was repealed from mere necessity."

Mr. Swayne.]

Then he goes on to deal with circumstances in which, in the bad seasons and so on, we find a parallel with our present position—

“During the French Revolution a most interesting example of indiscriminate price-fixing by the Government is recorded. Communication with oversea markets had been virtually stopped by the blockade of the British fleet. There had been a series of bad seasons. Trade and commerce had been disturbed by the taking away of a large number of artisans to fight in the army. A general atmosphere of insecurity had been created by the revolution and the continuous strife between the various classes. As a result, supplies of food fell off, and prices of the necessities of life greatly advanced. Shop pillaging and looting were of every day occurrence, and the efforts of the people to obtain cheap food did not stop short of even killing those who, it was alleged, were guilty of creating monopolies and cornering supplies.”

It goes on to point out—

“In September—some months after the first enactment of the ‘law of the maximum’—the convention settled maximum selling prices for meat, cattle, lard, butter, oil, fish, vinegar, brandy, and beer for a period of one year. It fixed, too, the prices of combustibles, candles, soap, sugar, metals, tobacco, raw materials, salaries, and wages. The basis on which the rates were determined was: That the maximum selling price of the commodities should be the average prices ruling in the year 1790, with 33½ per cent. added. Salaries and wages were fixed at the rate of 50 per cent. in advance of those obtaining in the same year.

“This general and indiscriminate fixing of prices brought about great disorganisation in industries and created many difficulties in commerce.”

Coming down to recent days, we find that only the other day the efforts which were being made in Victoria to fix a uniform price all the year round in connection with dairy products led to the position that at a certain time of the year they had none. I am reading now from “The Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria,” page 386. It says regarding butter—

“Prior to the era of price-fixing and controlling, the price of butter and cheese during the export season was determined by its value for export, and during the rest of the year it was regulated by the law of supply and demand. Usually no shortage was experienced in the off export season; producers were content to do all they possibly could to meet the demand, and, although dairying at this season seldom paid as well as operations in the spring months, the slightly higher prices ruling were considered sufficient inducement to continue the work during the late summer and winter months. The fixing of prices at approximately the same level the year round has resulted in the concentration of effort on the part of dairymen towards production during the spring and summer months only and carelessness in the winter time. Every effort is now made to bring an unduly large percentage of the herd into profit in the early spring. Sufficient fodder is not provided for the

slack period, and cows are permitted to go dry, though with a little trouble they might have been kept in full yield. Now that the war is over, it is to be hoped that dairymen will be allowed to carry on and develop the industry without the special restrictions of the recent few years.”

Again, we find on the continent of Europe countries which formerly were great sugar producers, through Government interference have had the supply so curtailed as to be forced to import at a high price from their neighbours. I have here “The International Sugar Journal” of June last, and I am quoting from page 265—

“The Government has refused to abolish the compulsory administration of sugar, and has also expressed its inability to comply with the request that it should at once fix fresh prices for beets. At present, therefore, general uncertainty prevails, and the farmers, who are now apportioning the crop, will not make any special arrangements for cultivating beets. The result will be that this summer countless millions of marks will leave the country in order to pay for Ukraine sugar, which will, of course, be only obtainable again at largely increased prices.”

I am mentioning these matters because I think it is only right that attention should be drawn, on behalf of the consumer, to the unwisdom of any rash interference in this matter. The experience in the past shows that the end is worse than the beginning. While I am on this matter of the various causes which have brought about high prices, is it not conceivable that the constant strikes we are having are partly to blame? Wilkinson is worth quoting again regarding the aspect that our paper currency also is responsible for high prices. He says on page 10—

“A sudden increase in the amount of money put in circulation, as the result of an influx of gold, Government and private loan expenditure, or the printing and circulation of paper money, will immediately increase the demand for commodities and induce a generally greater consumption.”

While I am on the subject of profiteering, I am quite prepared to admit that there have been grave shortcomings on the part of some, that all our traders have not been by any means immaculate in that regard. There is also profiteering in other walks of life—for instance, in the canefields when cane is burnt. A case came under my notice the other day where some cane had been burnt. We all know that the awards under which the men work lay down that there is to be a decrease in price for cutting burnt cane. Men who were earning £2 a day at the time and who knew the farmer was hard up and hoped to get as much as possible out of his crop to liquidate his debts, have imposed an extra charge of 2s. a ton. Was that not profiteering?

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

Mr. PETERSON (*Normanby*): I desire to make a few observations in connection with this very important matter. I desire to congratulate the Minister on the very able manner in which he introduced this Bill to the House. He showed clearly and conclusively

[*Mr. Swayne.*

from facts which had been carefully collated that the time is most opportune for the Government to take active steps towards bringing about the end of what we may aptly term the criminal high cost of living. The hon. member who has just sat down somewhat surprised me. Judging by his utterances, one would be led to believe there was no such thing as the high cost of living.

Mr. SWAYNE: Oh, no! I quite admitted that there was. I said you had the power to deal with it.

Mr. PETERSON: I am going to show, by authority equal to that of the hon. member, that we have not that power. I want briefly to deal with the hon. member as I go along and show exactly where he stands. First of all, he asks us to do nothing to discourage the producer. What does he mean by that? He means that no attempt should be made to regulate the price of any commodity which is produced in the State. Does the hon. member mean to infer that he is opposed to the Cane Prices Boards? Can the hon. member say that the Cane Prices Boards have not been the salvation of the cane industry in Queensland?

Mr. SWAYNE: Yes, but your law allows the Colonial Sugar Refining Company to contract themselves out.

Mr. PETERSON: The whole inference from the hon. member's speech was that he was against the fixing of prices at all. I give him a concrete illustration which affects his own electorate—the Cane Prices Boards—which give to the producers of cane a better price than they ever got before, and which the cane farmers would not throw away if they had the opportunity to-morrow. The hon. member should be consistent, and if he condemns price-fixing in other directions, I must take it he is also opposed to price-fixing by the Cane Prices Boards. The hon. gentleman said we should do nothing to discourage production. From one end of Queensland to the other the producer is roaring against the high prices. Is he not paying inflated prices for harness, vehicles, food-stuffs, and clothes? The high cost of living affects the producer in the country equally as much as it does those who live in the city. I am surprised at the hon. gentleman raising an objection on that score, because the whole community are going to benefit. It is not price-fixing that has hurt the producer in the past. It has been the middlemen who have received the whole of the benefit of the profits which have been made. We have heard no complaint on the part of members representing dairying constituencies on the other side against the Federal fixation of prices. Not a single word of protest has come from them. Consequently we must take it as hypocrisy on their part that, when the State attempts to do something to protect the people of Queensland, they have nothing whatever to say against their own party in the Federal sphere interfering with price-fixing.

Mr. SWAYNE: You already had the powers, and you did not use them.

Mr. PETERSON: The hon. gentleman said in his speech we had the powers. We will see if we had those powers. It is one thing to get up in this House and refer to an Act passed in 1914. It is another thing to prove that we had the power under that Act. The hon. gentleman knows as well as I do that, according to the Federal Constitution, once a State Act comes into conflict with a Federal Act, the Federal law is paramount.

Mr. SWAYNE: How did you fix the price of coal, then?

Mr. GLEDSON: We fixed the price of coal by agreement with the proprietors.

Mr. PETERSON: Yes, with the consent of the Federal authorities. I want to reply to the hon. gentleman's contention that we had the power and did not use it. I want to say I have procured from the Agricultural Department the copy of a wire that they received at the time the Federal authorities took over the price-fixing of butter. This wire reads—

“Official order increases price butter your State one penny per lb. Signed to-day operates Monday 13th October.”

The price of butter was fixed under the War Precautions Regulations of 1916. That wire practically showed that the Agricultural Department's handling of butter ceased under the War Precautions Act. Here we have clear evidence of the control of butter being taken completely out of the hands of the State by the Federal authorities.

Mr. SWAYNE: It was taken possession of.

Mr. PETERSON: The meaning of the hon. member's speech was that we had power under the 1914 Act to defy the Federal authorities. Now he admits the butter was taken possession of. How could the Federal authorities have taken possession of the butter, if we had the power he says under that Act?

Mr. SWAYNE: Other articles were not taken possession of.

Mr. PETERSON: My reply to that point is that if the Commonwealth Government had the power to take over the price-fixing of butter—which they did under the War Precautions Prices Regulations—they also had the power to take over the price-fixing of other articles which had not been pooled.

The leader of the Opposition the [5 p.m.] other evening made three essential points in his speech. The first point he made was that the Denham Government in 1914 passed an Act called the Control of Trade Act. That was his first point. His second point was that he challenged the Government to show that any profiteering existed in Queensland, and his third point was that there was no profiteering at all. If there was no profiteering in 1914, why did the Denham Government bring in a Bill in 1914 to deal with it? Every member of this Chamber knows quite well that so far as the cost of living is concerned it has gone up to double what it was in 1914.

Mr. SWAYNE: The Denham Government looked ahead.

Mr. PETERSON: In 1914 a Liberal Government found it necessary to deal with the high cost of living, so how much more necessary is it for a Labour Government to deal with it to-day? The leader of the Opposition said that the present Government had power to deal with the matter if they showed any desire to do so. The hon. gentleman said that we had power under the 1914 Act, but I will show that we have not got that power at all.

Mr. VOWLES: You have got that power to-day.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: That is very doubtful. It is a war measure, and it can be successfully challenged.

Mr. PETERSON: When the Commonwealth took over the power to fix prices, they assumed the control over the prices of fifty-two commodities. These include arrowroot

Mr. Peterson.]

(bulk and packets), arsenic, bacon, benzine and benzoline, biscuits and confectionery, bran, bread, butter, cheese, cocoas (imported—Van Houter's, Bensdorp's, Fry's), cocoa and milk (Nestlé's), coffee and milk (Nestlé's), cornflour, fertiliser (meatworks), flour, flour (self-raising), fruits (tinned, pineapples only), glaxo and lactogen, hams, jams (1s., 2s., and 3s., Australian manufacture), kerosene, matches (safeties only), milk (fresh), milk (condensed, Australian), milk (powdered), motor spirits, oatmeal (Australian), oil (linseed), pollard, rice, salmon (horseshoe), salt (coarse and fine), sauce (Lea and Perrin's, Holbrook's, I.X.L. tomato), starch (silver star). The Commonwealth assumed the power to deal with these things, and prevented the State from exercising its power in that direction. I might as well ask hon. members what was the power which prevented the State from fixing prices? At the last Federal election the Nationalist Government was returned, and immediately after they put the War Precautions Act into operation, and seized from the State the powers which it had under any Act to deal with prices. Price-fixing was then left at the mercy of the Commonwealth. I quite admit that the Commonwealth did fix prices after taking the powers away from the State, but they did not insist on seeing that those prices were carried out. The result was that the grocers and others concerned flouted the Act. I remember reading an article by Mr. McWilliam, one of our Brisbane business men, who said that the orders were being constantly flouted. Consequently, we find that we are at the mercy of the profiteers. Someone might ask what this Government did when it had the chance? Everybody knows that in 1915 there was an increase in the cost of living, and this Government, when it came into power, started to bring about a reduction. Speaking of Rockhampton, I know that the Government reduced the price of bread from 6d. for the 2-lb. loaf to 4½d. in 1915. They also brought about a reduction in the price of meat and other commodities. It has been brought up here at different times that the cost of living has gone up since this Government came into power. As a matter of fact, during the time that we had control of price-fixing, the Government succeeded in reducing the cost of living by 13.2 per cent. We did something to reduce the cost of living when we had the opportunity, but the Federal Government was allowed to fitch away our rights, and it was because of the fact that the Federal Government took over the fixing of prices that caused our people to be left in the way they were. When the Denham Government passed that Act in 1914 we know that prices went up immediately, so that when this Government came into power in 1915 the cost of living was greater than it was in 1914. The Labour party exercised its powers at that time, and did something to reduce the cost of living. That they succeeded in doing it is well known to everyone. The Interstate Commission, in reporting on the high cost of living in Australia, makes this point very clear: It points out that a great difficulty will be encountered in endeavouring to deal with price-fixing, because, generally speaking, Australia is a huge importer. Australia imports very largely, and is really not self-contained, so that the Interstate Commission anticipated great difficulty would be experienced because of that. I think we can meet the question of the high cost of living by passing this Bill, and that can be augmented by the Government

taking immediate steps to enter into competition with the huge combines that are operating at the present time. We know that monopolies are combining. We can read that through the lines of the Interstate Commission's report. The only way to deal with the question is to pass a Bill like this and enter into competition with the shipping combines, and also into competition with the clothing and boot manufacturers. I recollect reading a report about five months ago that Dr. Moloney asked a question in the Federal Parliament about the cost of producing the military suits served out to the soldiers? The answer he got was that the magnificent material cost 5s. 6d. a yard, that it cost about 13s. 6d. to make, or a total of about £1 13s. 3d. for each suit. If the Commonwealth authorities are able to manufacture those suits at that price, it is clear that the State Government can successfully enter into competition with the other manufacturers of those lines, and so bring down the prices. If the State Government cannot do it, then I hope the various unions will step in and use the funds at their disposal for carrying on the business themselves. It would be an easy matter for the unions to get control of the various industries, and they could compete successfully with the other manufacturers. There is one point that I would like to emphasise, and it is this: We have heard time and again that the reason why the cost of living has gone up is because of the arbitration awards, and because the employees are continually asking for increases in wages, and these have to be passed on. On page 42 of the Interstate Commission's report I find that the number of soft-goods firms operating in Australia in 1914 was seventeen, with a capital of £3,553,535, and they had a turnover of £5,116,961, leaving a net profit of £296,189. Let us look at the war period. In 1917, with practically the same capital as 1914—namely, £3,646,492—they had a turnover of £6,566,655, and a net profit of £554,780. That shows clearly that the manufacturers were receiving a considerable increase for the goods they manufactured. I want to set that net profit side by side with what the workers in these industries received during the same period. On page 25 of the Interstate Commission's report will be found the evidence of the president of the Master Tailors' Association regarding the cost of making factory-made clothing. He gives the rates for 1914 and 1918, as follows:—

" COST OF MAKING FACTORY-MADE
CLOTHING, VIDE EVIDENCE OF PRESIDENT,
MASTER TAILORS' ASSOCIATION,
TO INTERSTATE COMMISSION, PAGE 25.

1914.		£	s.	d.
Material, 3¼ yds., at 5s. yd. ...		0	16	3
Trimmings		0	7	6
Making		1	10	0
		2	13	9
Profit (gross) 33½ per cent. ...		0	17	11
Selling price		3	11	8
Material, at 7s. yd.		1	2	9
Trimmings		0	7	6
Making		1	10	0
		3	0	3
Gross profit, 33½ per cent. ...		1	0	1
Selling price		4	0	4

[Mr. Peterson.]

	1918.		
Material, same at 13s. 6d. yd.	2	3	10
Trimming	0	17	6
Making	1	15	0
		4	16
Gross profit, 33½ per cent.	1	12	1
Selling price	6	8	5
Material, same at 23s. yd.	3	14	9
Trimming	0	17	6
Making	1	15	0
		6	7
Gross profit	2	2	5
Selling price	8	9	8

The wages of the workers and tailors show an increase of 5s. per suit in both cases. The cost of the suit in the first instance was £2 16s. more. The difference in the profit to the manufacturer—namely, between 17s. 11d. and £1 12s. 1d.—is 14s. 1d. In the second case the manufacturer's profits show an increase from £1 0s. 1d. to £2 2s. 5d., or an increase of £1 2s. 4d. That shows clearly that the manufacturer obtained nearly three times the amount that the worker received as increase as a result of the inflated prices. That, I contend, refutes the argument of hon. members who are continually saying that the workers are receiving such high wages that it is imperative on the part of the employers to send up the cost of living. To come to a question nearer home, the leader of the Opposition challenged us to say whether there was any profiteering in Queensland. The hon. member knows perfectly well that so far as Queensland is concerned it is not a great producing State, and it has not many secondary industries. These secondary industries are mostly in Sydney and Melbourne, and consequently the prices ruling here, so far as producers and other trades are concerned, are ruled by the market prices in Sydney. The Interstate Commission says that there is a combination of manufacturers. A grocer, who is a friend of mine, told me that they are not allowed to go out of Queensland to buy the goods they require. They must buy in Queensland, and sell at the price fixed by the wholesale people. You can see the combination prices in the window sometimes. If these combinations are in operation, that is what accounts for the high cost of living. I do not say that it is the small grocer who is fleecing the people at all. It is the big combines behind the grocer who are doing it. To give a concrete illustration of profiteering in Queensland is very difficult, because we import the big bulk of our stuff.

Mr. ROBERTS: Can you say that this Bill will do any good?

Mr. PETERSON: Yes, and I will give an illustration. I noticed an advertisement in the paper saying that the bakers of Brisbane had decided to raise the price of bread. When the manufacturers want to rise their prices they don't go to the Arbitration Court. They immediately form a council, and become direct actionists of the purest type.

Mr. GUNN: Like members of Parliament.

Mr. PETERSON: You took your whack both times.

Mr. GUNN: How do you know?

Mr. PETERSON: I think you did.

Mr. GUNN: You are wrong.

Mr. PETERSON: We will see. I will ask a question about it.

Mr. COLLINS (to Mr. Gunn): You are one of the exploiters. You did not require it.

Mr. PETERSON: However, bakers together with other manufacturers, can get together, and, by direct action, force prices up. What have they done? They have notified by advertisement that they are going to increase the price of bread, from Monday next I think it is, from 4½d. to 5d. a loaf. At the time the wages award was given to the men engaged in this industry, the price of flour was £12 15s. per ton. Later it went up to £12 17s. 6d., and the reason it went up that 2s. 6d. was on account of the seamen's strike. Since that strike flour has dropped to £12 7s. 6d., which is 7s. 6d. per ton less than before the time when the men went to the Arbitration Court to get an increase in wages. The workers in the baking industry on the whole received an increase, through that award, of 6s. per week. The manufacturers, on the other hand, have raised during the past twelve months the price of bread by 1d. a loaf. One penny on 4d. is a very high percentage, especially in view of the fact that the workers got an award at a time when flour was higher than it is to-day. One baker, in giving evidence before His Honour Mr. Justice McCawley, said that his sales were 30,000 2-lb. loaves of bread per week, and he employed ten men. If you take this as a general illustration, we find that, under the arbitration award, the increased wages of those men averaged about £2 per week, but the extra ½d. which he is putting on to the bread, on that 30,000 turnover, amounts to £62 per week, and the workers get £2 of it. The hon. member wants a local illustration of profiteering—here he has it in extenso. He could not get anything better.

Mr. GUNN: Why don't you go in for a baker's shop?

Mr. PETERSON: Well, the point is not why we do not go in for bakers' shops, but the trouble with hon. members is that we have gone in for too much already; and I believe that until the Labour movement becomes educated and realises what is in front of it; until that time comes, I have no hope for improved conditions; but when it does come, the workers will see to it that they will get a little of the profits that they have been building up for such a long time, and will not be exploited. (Hear, hear!)

The hon. gentleman also asked in his speech for other evidences of profiteering. We have operating here to-day in Australia what is known as the meat trust. Surely hon. members are not going to argue that we have no meat trusts operating in Australia to-day! And although the Government has, under a special contract with the meatworks and the squatters, been able to give a great number of the people of Queensland cheaper meat, unfortunately, the big bulk of the people have not been able to get the benefit of it, because we were not able to get sufficient supplies. But hon. members know well that the time is nearing maturity when the meatworks contract will expire by effluxion of time, and the result I think will find us—if we are not prepared—at the mercy, to a certain extent, of the big meat trust operating in Australia to-day. To prove, briefly, that we are affected by this, let me just quote from the "Melbourne Morning Herald" of 15th November, 1918. It says—

"Mr. Astor, secretary to the Food
Mr. Peterson.]

Ministry, said the danger to be feared from the operations of the American meat trust was far more serious than people realised. It was a danger to all importing countries. The trust had branches in the Argentine, Australia, and New Zealand, and it controlled 50 per cent. of the available importable world's supplies of meat. There was going to be a real meat shortage in Europe, but he believed the inter-Allied Food Council would be stronger than the meat trust, and would be able to dictate to that organisation."

Mr. Massey, one of the Ministers in the New Zealand Cabinet, about six weeks ago was also complaining against the operations of that meat trust as far as New Zealand was concerned, and I believe that unless this Government has a Bill, which shall become an Act, so that it will have the power to deal with companies of this nature, we, too, at a later date, will be at the mercy of the American meat trust.

I hope that this Chamber, together with the Upper Chamber, will pass the measure speedily and give the Government an opportunity of giving the people a chance to get a reduced cost in their living. I do not desire to speak at greater length. I have tried, in my humble way, to place before the Chamber what I consider to be facts, and no member on the other side so far has shown that we are not afflicted with profiteering. Some of them have tried to apologise for it, but I believe if the people of Queensland were asked to give a vote, whether or not the Government should have power to deal with this very important question, they would vote overwhelmingly in favour of the Government having such power. (Hear, hear!) I hope the Bill will go through, and that as a result we will be able to show the people of Queensland, seeing that in the first instance the Federal Government have robbed us of our powers to deal with it, that now that we are free to deal with it we have accomplished something to reduce the cost of living.

Mr. GUNN: I have a few words to say on this Bill. My name has been brought into the debate on more than one occasion, and I would like to point out that I do not think there is any occasion at all for this Bill. I remember, when the Control of Trades Bill came before this House, how the Premier then conferred with the leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ryan, and how it was almost unanimously passed in this Chamber, how later on it went up to another Chamber, and Mr. Leahy there pointed out that this was not only a war measure. He moved an amendment to make it only a war measure, but was persuaded to withdraw his amendment. If you read "Hansard" you will see conclusively that it is not a war measure, and if you read the Bill you will certainly find that it is not a war measure.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Read Mr. Denham's speech.

Mr. GUNN: I have read them all. Then, when the Denham Government were in power they appointed a Price Fixing Board for the South, Central, and North. In the South a Mr. Watson was appointed. The leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ryan, moved the adjournment of the debate, finding fault with the Denham Government for making that appointment. He pointed out that it was a very unwise appointment, and said

[Mr. Peterson.

some very nasty things. Then, when the Ryan Government came into power a few months afterwards, they got rid of Mr. Watson, and appointed Mr. Sumner to take charge of the Bill.

Mr. GILLIES: A very good man, too.

Mr. GUNN: Yes, and Mr. Sumner carried on for some time. At a later period the Federal Government brought in their price-fixing under the War Precautions Act, which superseded the Queensland Act while it was in force. They still maintained Mr. Sumner in that position for a time, but after some time he resigned, as he said he could not make anything of price-fixing.

Mr. HARTLEY: Because the Commonwealth Government was not sincere.

Mr. GUNN: I happen to have a couple of "Gazettes" here—one for 1914 and one for 1916.

Mr. HARTLEY: Have you got the "Commonwealth Gazette" there?

Mr. GUNN: I do not want it.

Mr. HARTLEY: Yes, you do. You quote the prices fixed by the State and those fixed by the Commonwealth on the same article.

Mr. GUNN: Mr. Denham, in a proclamation in the "Gazette" of 27th September, 1914, fixed the retail price of meat. Mr. Hunter, when he took over charge of that department under the same Act, made a proclamation on the 14th July, 1916, and the two proclamations read this way—

DENHAM.		HUNTER.	
27th Sept., 1914.		14th July, 1916.	
Fillet steak ...	9d.	10d.	
Rump steak ...	8	9	
Sirloin ...	7	8	
Ribs ...	5	6½	
Beef steak ...	6	7	
Corned beef ...	6	7	
Brisket ...	4½	4½	

If you like to look at page 1155 of Mr. Denham's proclamation and page 1877 of Mr. Hunter's proclamation, you will see there the prices of other commodities. This proclamation was evidence that the Government had power, and exercised it, under the Control of Trades Bill. I therefore maintain that there is no occasion for bringing in this Bill. It is only a bit of window-dressing or camouflage.

Mr. HARTLEY: Now you are side-stepping.

Mr. GUNN: The Minister, when introducing the Bill, mentioned my name several times. He said I was like Diogenes looking with a lamp, not for an honest man, but for a profiteer. We are all profiteers if it comes to that; but I suppose he meant an undue profiteer. We are all out to make profit. I then said and I say now—

"If we can find any man who is making a profit that is detrimental to the people of Queensland—a profit that is not a fair thing—then I say you should prosecute him."

And I say so still. I have never been able to find these particularly vicious profiteers. I have been going, like Diogenes, with a lamp and have heard of profiteers here and there, but have never been able to run them down. No doubt there are some, but I have not been able to locate them, neither has the Government; because they had power under the Control of Trades Bill for some considerable time, but ran down no profiteers—they only ran up the prices of

commodities. When this Bill is passed, who is it going to hurt; it is not who is it going to benefit, because I do not think it is going to benefit anybody. It is going to hurt the primary producer.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. GUNN: That is the only man you can get at.

Mr. HARTLEY: Poor old primary producer; put him in a glass case.

Mr. GUNN: If you are going to fix the price of things you bring from overseas, the merchant produces his invoices and shows what he has paid, and you must give him something for his trouble of distributing them and you therefore very soon get at what is a fair thing and cannot interfere with the prices of the commodities. You have tried it before—Mr. Sumner has tried it, and was not able to interfere with anything from overseas. But they can fix the price of butter, which is a thing that we export from Queensland, and they throw the burden on to the farmer.

Hon. J. G. APPEL: And they can commandeer it, too.

Mr. GUNN: And they can commandeer it. They can fix the price of wheat, which goes back on to the primary producer. And they can fix the price of meat, which goes back on to the primary producer. But the overseas commodities you cannot fix the price of, and if you are going to interfere with the primary producer, what are you going to do? You are going to make him go to other countries. He should get the value of his goods, deducting carriage, of course. I notice, according to some of the latest statistics, how the people are leaving their dairy farms. This is a very deplorable thing, and will be accentuated as far as they are concerned by price-fixing.

Mr. HARTLEY: £60 cheques a month for cream.

Mr. GUNN: According to these statistics, in 1917, as compared with 1918, in general farming there was a decrease of 2,264 adults—that was people working on the farms. In dairying there was a decrease of 3,907 adults, or a total of 6,171 fewer adults working on the farms in 1918 than in 1917. Is not that a sad state of affairs? Instead of fixing the prices of butter and cheese, [5.30 p.m.] the Government will have to give the farmers more to get them to stay on the land. In the area under crop there was a decrease of 202,441 acres, and in area in fallow—that is, land going out of cultivation—there was an increase of 193,008. That is all very sad reading to me, and instead of fixing the prices of butter and cheese we ought to allow them to get the world's parity for what they produce. I could say a lot more about the way in which land settlement is falling off in Queensland. The people are leaving the country and going to the city.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Owing to the high prices of material.

Mr. GUNN: Compare four years of Denham Government with four years of Labour Government. Between 1911 and 1914 a total of 6,965 farms under agricultural homestead and perpetual lease conditions were taken up, or an average per year of 1,741. Then Labour came into power, and from 1915 to 1918 there was a total of 3366, or an average per year of 841 farms. The total of all

classes of selection, except pastoral lease, was 11,841 in Denham's time from 1911-1914, or an average of 2,960 per year. In Labour's time, 1915-1918, the total was 5,991, or an average per year of 1,497.

Mr. MORGAN: One-half!

Mr. GUNN: More than one-half. If that does not show that the people are leaving the land, I do not know what does. People talk about fixing the price of beef. They forget that the majority—I might almost say the big majority—of people who own cattle are small people. The total number of cattle owners in Queensland in 1917 was 40,664, of whom 38,720 owned cattle in herds of under 301 head. That leaves only 1,944 owners of herds of over 300 each—and I do not think there are many millionaires who own 300 head. If you hurt one of those men owning 300 head, by fixing his prices, you grievously hurt twenty persons, each owning 300 head, so I say it is dangerous to interfere with the primary producer.

Mr. HARTLEY: Fix the price of wire and galvanised iron.

Mr. GUNN: You cannot fix the price of wire or galvanised iron, because you import it. The only things of which you can fix the price are things that Australia produces, and if you start interfering with them, people who grow those commodities will find it better to go to some other country where they are not interfered with by price-fixation. Every award that comes out gives better conditions to the man in the city, and the consequence is that when the dairy farmer's son comes to the Exhibition in Brisbane he perhaps goes back and says to his father: "I saw so and so at the show. He is in a very good position running a tram or something or other. I think I will live in the city. I will send you 10s. or £1 a week, and that will help you on the farm." He goes down and perhaps meets a nice girl and gets married. Then his sister comes down to stay with him and she gets married, and after a time the poor old man and woman are left alone on the farm without their children. They are all away in the city. After a time the man and the woman get old and they have to go to live with their son-in-law or their daughter-in-law in the city, and the land goes into fallow and the big pastoralist runs cattle over the farm that once was producing wheat or butter.

We hear a great deal about undue profits. If any private firm in Brisbane were allowed to buy fish from the fishermen at 3d. per lb. and sell it at over 6d., they would be called profiteers. There would be immediately a cry, "Deal with the profiteer!" Yet that is what the Government are doing—giving 3d. per lb. and retailing it at an average of over 6d.—making 100 per cent.—and yet they are not making it pay. Then the Government made a forced contract with the meatworks to buy meat at 3d. to 3½d. which they are selling at an average of 5d. They make on the average a profit of 70 per cent., and they do not even kill it. They send the meat to the meatworks up the river or across the river, who kill it for them, and then they sell it at an average of 70 per cent. profit and only just make the business pay, even without paying rates and taxes on their shops.

Mr. COLLINS: Do the people get cheap meat? That is the main question.

Mr. Gunn.]

Mr. GUNN: If the butchers of Brisbane were allowed to do the same thing, they would make a fortune out of it. This cry about the profiteer is a very nice cry on which to go to the country, a very useful cry. It is a cry that the party opposite exploited very well four years ago.

Mr. COLLINS: Is not the Prime Minister going to Australia on the question of hanging the profiteer?

Mr. GUNN: Well, I say it is a very nice electioneering cry. In a pamphlet issued four years ago on "The high cost of living. Who is to blame?"—I have it in my box, but I do not want to lose it, so I have taken a copy—I find—

"The Labour party will endeavour to cheapen the cost of living by attacking the cause of high prices."

Mr. WHITFORD: We are going to do it.

Mr. GUNN: I do not know what they have attacked in the way of high prices. I see that they have fixed beef at 1d. per lb. higher than the Denham Government. The first method mentioned is—

"By regulating trusts and combines."

They have been in power four years—what trust or combine have they regulated? I do not know of any. That was their election cry. The next method was—

"By destroying injurious monopolies."

What injurious monopoly have they destroyed? I have seen no monopoly that they have even attacked. They have only passed Acts of Parliament. You want actions, besides Acts of Parliament.

Mr. HARTLEY: We could not get past the first monopoly—the Upper House.

Mr. GUNN: Another method was—

"By putting in gaol the cornerer of supplies."

What cornerer of supplies have they put in gaol? They said that the pastoralists cornered cattle and would not send them to the meatworks. They said that the farmer cornered wheat stacks, and would not send them to the market. Why did they not put them in gaol? Another method was—

"By preventing the destruction of wholesome food."

That alludes to some fish, I suppose, that was destroyed during Mr. Barnes's time as Treasurer. It went bad or they could not sell it—I forget which. This Government came along and the fishermen catch fish at Southport. They send it to market at South Brisbane, but they have plenty of fish there and they dump it—send it back or dump it in the river. They dump far worse than ever. The next method was—

"By establishing better methods of food distribution."

What better methods of food distribution have they established?

Mr. HARTLEY: State butcher's shops and fish shops.

Mr. GUNN: I do not know that the State butcher's shops have given better distribution. The Government have commandeered meat and are distributing it cheaper, but there is no better distribution. Under the old method the butcher used to come round and deliver your meat.

Mr. MORGAN: The tramways are getting the extra money.

Mr. GUNN: In the old way you ordered your meat and you did not have to pay

cash. You got a monthly bill. In the present way, if you are a poor person and your pay is not due, you cannot get your meat until pay day. No cash, no meat!

Mr. WHITFORD: Do you not believe in the cash system?

Mr. GUNN: Of course I do believe in the cash system, but many a time have I assisted somebody poorer than myself by giving him credit, and the storekeeper is keeping the "cocky" going far more than the Government in the country districts, and in the same way the storekeeper is keeping the fossicker going far more than the Government are doing. The pamphlet went on to say—

"If you want to keep down the cost of living, vote for the Labour candidate."

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. GUNN: They voted for the Labour candidate and they sent him into this House, and the cost of living has gone up in Queensland at a greater rate than in any other State. It is no use blaming the Federal Government, because they rule equally in all the other States.

Mr. HARTLEY: Wait until you see wages go up to equal it.

Mr. GUNN: Whom was this compiled by? It was compiled by "E. G. Theodore and J. A. Fihelly for the campaign committee of the Queensland Labour party." (Laughter.) Before they came into power we were told that the sawmillers were forming a combine and that they would fix up this combine—they were going to start a mill and cut cheap timber. They started a sawmill or several sawmills, but I see that fruitgrowers prefer to go to private mills because they give them fruit cases cheaper. Then, again, last year or the year before, they sent three-quarters of a million feet of timber to the Southern States. This year they sent half a million feet of timber away.

Mr. HARTLEY (*Fitzroy*): I rise to a point of order. I want to know if the hon. member is in order in discussing on this Bill the prices and the export of timber to Southern States?

The SPEAKER: It is my opinion that it is perfectly in order. (Hear, hear!)

Mr. GUNN: More has been sent to the Southern States than before, and the Government, if they had been thoughtful for the people of Queensland, could have sold it to the people in Queensland who wanted it. I would like to see the price of log timber leaving by rail or sea raised so that it could be kept in Queensland. (Hear, hear!) We are the greatest producers of all the States so far as timber is concerned, and if we are not careful, we will denude our forests and have no timber left at all. That is one thing they failed in. Then, there is the fish. (Laughter.) Do not hon. members remember the cry that the "Dagoes" were making a fortune? It was said, "We will see to that. We will start fish shops. We will get a trawler, trawl the fish, and give the people cheap fish." The fish is dearer now than ever it was. The venture shows a loss, not a profit. I do not mind the Government catching fish and selling it to the people, but I do not see why they should have made a monopoly of the fish business. A gentleman named Mr. Marwedal had a trawler many years ago, and sent it trawling outside the Bay. He found the bottoms were not conducive to good trawling. In that case a private individual failed. The first time the Government trawler goes out the nets catch

[*Mr. Gunn.*]

on the rocks, and I believe £300 was lost. It is not the fault of the men working the trawl or of the trawl itself. There are several sandy patches, but these wretched Tories will not let the fish get into the sandy patches, but keep them on rocks. (Laughter.) So it is with all the other industries. Take the case of the lime-crushing. They went into my electorate, and were going to show everybody how to crush lime. That prove a dead failure. They also started an arsenic mine in my district. I am happy to say I think that the arsenic mine is going to be a great success so far as getting arsenic is concerned. But man cannot live by arsenic alone. (Laughter.) Then, one of the speakers said something about motor-cars sent to France by the Americans being burnt wholesale rather than give them to the British. If my information is right, that is not true, because I saw in one of the late cables that the Americans had handed over all their war supplies to the French people at a very moderate price. I think it mentioned that many motor-cars were handed over to the French people, who will be able to use them in France. We hear all sorts of things about the destruction of property, but I am like Diogenes—I am looking with the lamp to find the people who destroy all this property when there is somebody else who is willing to buy it. If there is anybody willing to purchase motor-cars, I think whoever owns them will sell them at the best value to him. It does not matter twopence whether this Bill is passed or not. The Government have plenty of power under the Control of Trade Act. This is brought forward only to tickle the ears of the electors, particularly at a time when there is a Federal election. It will be good stuff with which to go to the country and abuse Mr. Hughes—to point out that he did not do this or that, and to say they are prepared to bring this Act into force. The Government will find they are just as impotent as they were when they had Mr. Sumner fixing the prices before.

Mr. TAYLOR (*Windsor*): I think the greatest disappointment most of us had in listening to the speech of the Minister, when introducing this Bill, was in the fact that, while he suggested certain remedies should be introduced in order to control what he termed "profiteering," he did not mention a single word about the fact that, if we wished to clear profiteering out of the State, one thing that was necessary was more production and more work. He quite ignored that aspect of the question. He did not say a word about what production was going to do, or what more work would do.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: Oh, yes! I did.

Mr. TAYLOR: Well, I listened very carefully to his speech, and I have read it in "Hansard." I think one of the most prominent features of such a speech should have been in the direction of more work and increased production. The Bill seems to me to savour very largely of a man going out to grub a tree and starting at the topmost branch instead of at the root. By some laborious means he gets up to the topmost branch, and with a little bit of a tomahawk starts to knock off some of the small branches. Any measure which has for its object the betterment of the conditions of the people must have the support of every sensible man. The Minister, in this Bill, should have confined himself to the two particular things

which he mentioned, and the appointment of a Commissioner. I fail to see why we want all this other "tripe" and "tarradiddle," because it is nothing else, in connection with this matter. In giving a summary of what he considered the measure contained, he read out this—

"Every person commits an offence who—

(a) Monopolises or attempts to monopolise or combines or conspires with any other person to monopolise wholly or partially the demand or supply in Queensland or any part thereof of any commodity;

if such monopoly or control is of such a nature as to be contrary to the public interest."

No one on this side of the House is opposed to that. Then he read out this—

"(b) Combines or conspires with any other person to control, wholly or partially, the demand or supply or price in Queensland or any part thereof of any commodity;

if such monopoly or control is of such a nature as to be contrary to the public interest."

We are all in favour of that. What do we find all this other rubbish here for? It is nothing else but rubbish—half the contents of this Bill—and the Minister and the members on the Government side know it perfectly well. Profiteering, I contend, is largely a cry so far as Queensland is concerned. The fact that high prices prevail in quite a number of directions for quite a number of commodities is not evidence that profiteering is in existence in regard to those commodities. There are quite a number of contributing things which have tended to increase the cost of living during the past four years. You cannot take 30,000,000 or 40,000,000 people—probably there were nearly that number when you consider the number of refugees and those who had to fly from their homes and add them to the number of men who were on the battlefields—for a period of four years from the various avenues of production and restore the balance a few short months after the war is over. It takes years of work to restore what previously were flourishing communities. Profiteering may be in existence in some directions; no doubt, it is. But I think, when the Minister came along with a measure such as this, he should have put before the members of this Chamber some substantial evidence of where it was working to the detriment of the people. What do we find the Minister doing? He read out the names of nine companies doing business in Australia. Some of these companies were doing business largely in New Zealand, and some of them in other parts of the world. He read out the amount of profits and reserves, comparing, I think, the years 1916 and 1918. If we examine the figures of those nine companies, what do we find? There was one small company of about £78,000, whose head office is in Queensland, which added £7,000 to its reserves. Not one of the other companies has its head office in Queensland. The business they do in Queensland is small compared with what they do in other States. If the Minister divided the whole of the profits of those nine companies, and the whole amount of money they have put to the reserves, it would mean a little over a pound note to every man, woman, and child in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Taylor.]

That would not add very much to their material comfort in any shape or form. Yet we have trotted out such stuff as that, when we know there is really nothing in it at all—that there is a good deal of “tarradiddle” in it. My idea is that the high cost of living at the present time is contributed to more by the drought than by anything else. I venture to say that if we had 6 inches of rain, distributed throughout the Commonwealth of Australia before the end of the present week, and falling over two days, we would find the biggest slump in prices Australia has ever known, without any governmental control, without any commissioner to see that the prices should be curtailed in any direction. It is the scarcity of the necessary articles of life, and it is the extraordinary demand coming from all parts of the world, that are the main contributing factors in the present high cost of living. In a lesser degree industrial trouble and higher wages are taking their part in contributing to that high cost. There is no doubt that decreased production is one of the main features which has accentuated the high cost of living. The Minister made an extraordinary statement or two in his speech. He said that the greater production, the higher the prices. I have never heard such an extraordinary statement in my life. It is quite evident to me that, after the Minister has had about twelve months in charge of the industrial enterprises of the Government, he will change his opinion—probably a good while before that—because, if increased production means anything at all—and it does mean a lot—it means lesser cost and lesser prices. Then he introduced the matter of the wheat, and said that thousands of tons of wheat had rotted in Australia during the past three or four years. Unfortunately, we know that, to a great extent, that is true; but we also know that, unless certain control had been taken of the wheat in Australia during that period, the loss would have been very much greater.

(Sitting suspended from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.)

Mr. TAYLOR (continuing): At the tea adjournment I was speaking on various matters associated with what we may term profiteering. During the course of this debate the matter of the price of wheat and bread has been referred to by several hon. members. Any member who is cognisant at all of the wheat and bread prices that exist to-day throughout the world must know perfectly well that, so far as Australia is concerned, we are being fed with bread much cheaper than any other country. When one considers that it was only in the short space of between four and five years that the Queensland Government and other Governments in Australia were obliged, on account of the shortage of wheat, to import quite a lot into this country in order that the people might be fed, one must be struck by the extraordinary change that has taken place during the past few years. The fact remains that we have been able to maintain ourselves. As a matter of fact, during the war period Australia has disposed of £250,000,000 of wheat and wool. That shows what a wonderful country Australia is, and, if properly organised, look what it is capable of doing. During this debate a considerable amount of abuse was hurled by the Minister for Public Works upon the Prime Minister of Australia and upon the Federal Government for what they failed to do. Anyone who has watched the

course of events during the war must know that, had it not been for a certain action taken by the Prime Minister during his first visit to England, when he purchased the Commonwealth line of steamers, a considerable quantity of our wheat could not have got to the old world at all. We know that freights are high at the present time, and they will continue high for a considerable time yet. Yet we know that the fact of the existence of that line of steamers helped largely to keep prices down. (Hear, hear!) It has been said that our farmers are not getting London parity. Hon. members know perfectly well that to reduce the price of bread or wheat below the present ruling prices in Australia would simply mean ruination to the wheat farmer. It has been pointed out in this Chamber on many occasions that probably one of the most unprofitable crops that our farmers engage in is wheatgrowing. It is very rarely that they get 5s. a bushel for their wheat, and we know that the average crop of wheat in Australia is something about thirteen or fourteen bushels an acre. Hon. members can work that out themselves and see what a man will get off 200 or 300 acres of wheat, even if he gets that price. To argue that we should get a cheaper loaf is absolutely impossible. We cannot produce it cheaper than we are producing it in Australia and serving it out to the people, so there is no justification for those remarks at all. The Prime Minister was roundly abused for what he did not do and for what he should have done. We were also told by the Minister that the Commonwealth Government prevented the Queensland Government from doing what it would have liked to do, but we find the Prime Minister, speaking in Brisbane last week, said that the Queensland Government had unrestricted powers and that it was not fettered in any way by any action the Federal Government took to control prices.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: He is absolutely wrong.

Mr. TAYLOR: That is what Mr. Hughes said, at any rate.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: The High Court determined that matter, not Mr. Hughes.

Mr. TAYLOR: It is remarkable that the Prime Minister should get up in a large public meeting and make that statement. Hon. members opposite know perfectly well that they have those powers, but they failed ignominiously and abjectly. They failed when they had the “Allinga,” their own boat, to carry provisions. What happened to the “Allinga”? It was tied up at the Brisbane wharves for weeks and weeks. Whose fault was that? The figures given to us by Mr. Knibbs, the Commonwealth Statistician, show us plainly and clearly that in no State of the Commonwealth has the cost of living gone up more than in Queensland. Hon. members opposite say that that is the fault of the Federal Government, but the Federal Government rules the other States the same as Queensland, yet, notwithstanding that, we cannot get away from Mr. Knibbs’s figures that the cost of living has gone up in Queensland since the present Government has been in power. In addition to that, production has fallen off. At one time we used to send to the Southern States of Australia £200,000 or £300,000 worth of

[Mr. Taylor.

maize. This year the drought has so adversely affected the production of maize that we are not able to send any out of this country at all—in fact, we have hardly enough for our own requirements, and we have to pay a high price for it. To what is that high price due?

Mr. RIORDAN: Because they allow you and Denham and Barnes to carry on.

Mr. TAYLOR: If the hon. gentleman makes a sensible interjection, I will reply to it, but to make an irrelevant remark about Barnes and Denham and myself is simply humbug. The reason for the high price is this: instead of getting 50 or 60 bushels per acre the farmers are only getting 10, 20, and 30 bushels per acre. That is the reason for the high price of maize. If the farmers got a crop approaching anything like that of previous years, we should not have such high prices ruling at the present time. The Minister referred to the question of leather and the profit made out of boots. What has this Government been doing so far as leather is concerned? They have been doing all they possibly can to get the highest possible price for their hides from their own State stations in the Southern States. The Government have not endeavoured to provide the people of Queensland with food at a reasonable price. We know that perfectly well, and they have not done anything to provide the people with leather at a reasonable price. I asked a question the other day, and I was told that there were 2,000 hides shipped to the Southern States. That was not the first shipment by any means. We are bringing back those self-same hides made into footwear for the people of this State.

Mr. COLLINS: Are you in favour of a State tannery?

Mr. TAYLOR: With regard to State enterprises generally, I am opposed to them, but some have my sympathy and support. I am in favour of a State cannery for soldiers.

Hon. J. G. APPEL: He said "tannery."

Mr. TAYLOR: I am not in favour of a State tannery. I have seen enough of State enterprises to make me do all I can to prevent any more being established. There are any amount of splendid tanneries in existence, but, unfortunately, we have not got enough boot factories in this State. Instead of importing goods from the Southern States we should be sending them the manufactured article. We should encourage these industries by all the means we possibly can. The legislation which has been introduced by the present Government has hampered those secondary industries and not given them the encouragement they deserve. We should try to develop all the industries we can in Queensland, but instead of doing that, this Government puts a break on them, and the result is that we have to suffer. We suffer from high prices and we suffer from a shortage of commodities, and so long as the legislation which has been introduced into this Chamber for some time continues, then our industries will be discouraged and the cost of living will keep up instead of going down.

With regard to the price-fixing by the Government, I would like to know who bears the brunt of all this business right from the start? I contend it is the primary producer—the man on the land. (Hear, hear!) He has to work seven days a week, and anything

from fourteen to sixteen hours a day, in order that the people in the cities and towns may be supplied with the necessities of life and live in comfort. Not only the man on the land, but his wife and family and his whole household have to work long hours each day in the work of production. Yet I heard one hon. member interject that the primary producer should not be considered at all. He really does not count at all, for he is not in this business at all. As a matter of fact, every man engaged in the secondary industries in this State is being carried along on the back of the man on the land. Instead of hampering him, we should give him encouragement. Because a man happens to be on land producing the necessary commodities of life, why should he be made to bear the burden of all taxation and legislation? Is there any particular reason why he should be singled out to bear the whole burden? I contend that, as far as we are concerned, the people in the cities and towns have a great asset in the man and woman engaged in agricultural life. They are the people who are helping to develop this country.

Mr. CARTER: You do well out of them.

Mr. TAYLOR: And you are doing better. (Laughter.) I return them something for what I do, but you live on them. You return them nothing, but simply sit in the Chamber and bark and howl. (Laughter.)

Mr. RIORDAN: You are a parasite.

Mr. TAYLOR: And you are a parasite on parasites. (Laughter.)

The SPEAKER: Order! Order!

Mr. TAYLOR: The prevailing high prices are not an indication of the fact that profiteering prevails. I can show how the matter exists to-day. Take one of our stable primary industries, the wool industry. Are the pastoralists or the people of Australia responsible for the prevailing high prices of wool in London? They have got nothing whatever to do with the high rate ruling.

Mr. COLLINS: Do you say that it should be regulated on the London price?

Mr. TAYLOR: It has been a good thing for Australia and for the Government that the high prices are prevailing. Whether London should control the price or not, I say that if a man is growing wool in Australia and he can get 5s. or 6s. per lb. in London, Belgium, or France, if any Government of this country says that so far as the people of this country are concerned they should sell their wool at 1s. 6d. or 2s. per lb., then I contend that the Government which says that should make up the difference to the woolgrowers from the whole of the people of this country. (Hear, hear!) I do not see why they should have to carry the burden of clothing people any more than other men engaged in any other industry. The hon. member says—if I understand him aright—"Get 6s. a lb. for your wool in London, but we must have it at 2s. a lb. here." If we are going to have it at 2s. here in order to have cheaper clothing, I contend the whole of the people should contribute the difference between what the man can get outside and what the Government are prepared to give him. There is no doubt in my mind that the slogan of the Government, instead of being so much this profiteering cry, should be how they can increase production. Some of the greatest minds in the world who have

Mr. Taylor.]

studied the question—the American Food Commissioner and other men who have been in touch with the present prices and the present scarcity—know perfectly well that if we are to have an alteration or a reduction in value, and are going to feed and clothe our people at lesser money, it must be by increased production. Instead of that, we are tinkering here with a Bill which, so to speak, proposes to grub out a tree by starting at the topmost branches.

Mr. COLLINS: The United States are losing 1,000,000 people a year.

Mr. TAYLOR: All the States are losing everywhere; and we are going to lose so long as we go on as at present. We had none of this trouble with regard to profiteering before the war. We have passed through four or five years of the greatest turmoil and trouble ever known, and are reaping the harvest of it now, and it is going to be a long time before things come back to normal. It is not going to bring them back to normal by introducing a Bill such as this. Now, who is going to control the prices?

Mr. WHITFORD: The worker.

Mr. TAYLOR: This Bill says that the Minister is going to control the prices. I would advise the hon. member to read clause 6. We get a whole lot about a Commissioner and assessors, but it all has to be controlled under the direction of the Minister. He can say what the price shall be, how it shall be controlled, appoint the officers, and do everything in connection with this matter.

Mr. WHITFORD: He is representing the worker.

Mr. TAYLOR: The Commissioner is only going to be a figurehead; he is going to have absolutely no power to control prices or remedy the existing defects. He will simply go along with recommendations to the Minister, who will look through them and say what shall be. We are told that the Commissioner and other officers shall not be members of Parliament nor hold particular offices nor yet be engaged in business. Why does not the same apply to the Minister? Why single out certain individuals and then say that all this tremendous power set forth in this Bill shall be possessed by the responsible Minister who shall occupy the position at the particular time.

Mr. COLLINS: What do you suggest?

Mr. TAYLOR: I should suggest that the Commissioner should have full and complete power apart from any Minister, that the recommendations and directions shall not be subject to any Minister. The Commissioner is the man who should have control, the man who has knowledge and experience, and who should be able to control it in a proper way, and which I contend no Minister—whether National, Liberal, or Labour—has; he would be, to a certain extent, biassed by his political beliefs.

I do not intend to delay the House any further. As I said in starting, the Minister placed before this House, in introducing this Bill, a summary dealing with the clause appointing his Commissioners "to carry out all that they seek to find out, etc.," but in reading the Minister's speech we find hardly one case where he is able to put his finger on actual profiteering. He brings in the tobacco trust, but people do not eat tobacco; some of them chew it and a good many smoke it; but, so far as the necessary commodities of life are concerned, he failed

[*Mr. Taylor.*

to show any particular instance where profiteering was being carried out to the detriment of the best interests of the people of the State. The Bill, as it exists at present, certainly will not have my support. I would like to see some measure introduced which would, as the leader of the Opposition pointed out, after making inquiries beforehand to find out the cause of things—whether they exist—then bring forward a remedy to deal with it, instead of all the provisions which we find wrapped up in this particular measure which, to my mind, is nothing else but an electioneering Bill. Electioneering Bills are introduced at times, and I suppose all Governments are prone to make use of them; but I hope that whatever is done will be in the best interests of Queensland, and that our primary producers will not be sacrificed for any cry for cheap prices and so chase them off the land as has been the case at present in many instances.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE (*Oxley*): The Minister, in introducing this Bill, cast the whole blame of the high cost of living upon the Federal Government, and although certain members have referred to this question previously, it is necessary to keep on repeating the statements so that the people of Queensland can exactly understand what has been the position with regard to the controlling of prices in Queensland during the past four or five years. The leader of the Opposition pointed out that in the year 1914 the Denham Government introduced a Control of Prices Bill, which, in my judgment, was a very excellent Bill, because it anticipated that, with the usual control of trade being removed, there would be individuals who would endeavour to exploit the people by unduly raising the cost of food. The Denham Government operated that Bill and, if I remember rightly, Mr. Watson was the Comptroller of Prices in Queensland under the Denham Administration. When the present Government took office, his position was taken by Mr. Sumner, who certainly did his utmost to tackle an extremely difficult proposition. The actual views of this Government upon the question of the fixation of prices, I think, are very aptly dealt with in their book "Socialism at Work," which gives three or four years' history of the Labour Administration. On page 26 this is what the present Government says—

"State regulation of prices had gone but a short distance towards affording protection. Every effort at restriction was met with protests from retailers and producers, who declared the Price Control Board were threatening them with ruin. There was no means of checking the accuracy, or otherwise, of these claims; and between the fleeced consumers on one side and the complainers on the other, the Government was placed in a false position. Ministers knew full well that an extortionate price was being charged for a necessary article of diet; but, until establishing the State shop, there was no evidence with which to prove any such contention. Neither were there practical means for dragging down prices to a fair level."

On page 32 of the same book this remark is made—

"Experience, both within and outside the Commonwealth, notably in America, has shown how many and serious are the difficulties standing in the way of

legislative control or restriction of the combination of capitalists in restraint of trade."

My object in referring to those passages is that, when the War Precautions Act was introduced by the existing Federal Government, the State Government was glad enough to get rid of those price-fixing attempts, because every man must know you are tackling an exceedingly difficult problem in the question of price-fixing. The Federal Government, under the War Precautions Act, issued certain tables, fixing the prices of certain commodities. Hon. members opposite complained that that was merely a farce and was not put into operation, although there was no lack of desire to give effect thereto; but it was nearly impracticable to put such a scheme into operation, as I will endeavour to show later. Hon. gentlemen opposite contend that the Commonwealth deprived them of powers they hitherto enjoyed of controlling the price of food-stuffs. The hon. member who has just resumed his seat stated that. That position is refuted by the Prime Minister in his speech at Wynnum on the 22nd, when he made this statement—

"As to profiteering, the Labour party had stated that the reason it had abated its attacks on the profiteers was because the Commonwealth had power to deal with them. It might have had power to deal with profiteering, but the power of the Queensland Government was unrestricted, and it could have done what it liked. He had asked the Queensland Government to give him all the necessary powers, but they would not give them to him."

(Government interruption.) That clearly disposes of the contention of hon. members opposite that this Government has not all the time had power to regulate prices of food-stuffs if it so desired; but it was only glad enough to take advantage of the position when the Federal Government issued the regulations under the War Precautions Act. Now, when an election is approaching, and they are very sore put to it to have some cry which will carry them to victory—and I say advisedly that they know perfectly well that their hope lies in the direction of the profiteer, and they think that by passing the whole blame and responsibility on to the Federal Government and the National party in this House they will try to mislead the people of Queensland sufficiently to let them think that ours is the fault. The position to-day is that, even supposing this Government had no power to control the prices of food, then by reason of the Commonwealth powers, as previous speakers stated, the same state of affairs existed in every State in Australia, yet, in spite of that, Queensland shows an increase of 64.5 per cent. in the cost of food-stuffs; New South Wales 52.4 per cent., and South Australia 38 per cent. It must be admitted that the same state of affairs must have existed throughout Australia if the power of fixing prices was limited to the Commonwealth. Yet in Queensland the increase in the cost of living is twice as much as has been experienced in South Australia. That shows the ridiculous contention of hon. members opposite, and how hard put they are when they try to put the blame upon the Federal Government for the high cost of living that exists in Queensland. (Government interruption.) It is rather amusing to hear

this Government blaming the Commonwealth for not exercising its powers for fixation of prices under the War Precautions Act while, for years past, we have had these same gentlemen howling about the War Precautions Act. When this Act hits or pricks them, it is the worst iniquity that could be introduced. When it can be used for

[7.30 p.m.] an argument to bolster up their own case, to show that the Commonwealth should have fixed the prices, then, they say, why are those powers not used in Queensland to control the cost of living? The insincerity and the hollowness of the whole position are so apparent to any thinking man that it is rather amusing to hear hon. members opposite bringing it forward. Our mission during the next few weeks is to see that the people of Queensland and Australia generally really know what the position is.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: They will know it, all right.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: They will; and I am quite certain that every hon. member occupying these Opposition benches is going to do his best to show the hollow insincerity of the whole position. The War Precautions Act has been repealed since May last, so far as the fixation of prices is concerned. This Government have during that period of approximately six months had at their disposal a Prices Bill which they have not attempted to put into use in any shape or form. No attempt has been made to use that Bill to restrain the activities of these terrible profiteers; and, further than that, this session has been in progress for three months, and yet this is the first we have seen of this Bill. If, as the Governor's Speech stated, the position was preventing the Government from doing a fair thing for the soldier, if it was the main cause of the industrial unrest which existed, I contend that this Bill should have been one of the first measures introduced. Yet, it has been brought in at the tail-end of the session—for we know that the House is probably going to rise in three or four weeks. It has been brought in as near as possible to the Federal elections so that members opposite can say, when they go to the country: "Here, we introduced this measure. We are the saviours of the people by wanting to deal with these profiteers"—knowing perfectly well, as they do, that there is no time to pass it.

Mr. WHITFORD: Do you say that profiteering does not exist?

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: I am one of those who previously stated in this House, and I repeat it now—that profiteering does exist in Queensland. Undoubtedly, it exists in Queensland, and it exists more particularly in other parts of the world than even in Queensland. I will say this further—that combines exist in Queensland and in other parts of Australia, and if this Bill is going to have as its object and as its result the institution of some kind of a court, or commission, which will give the people of Queensland the opportunity of testing the complaints they have against the profiteer and the combines which allegedly exist, it will be doing good. I am of the opinion that a court, or commission, is essential in order to give the people an opportunity of ventilating their grievances against the present high standard of living, so that they can get at the real state of affairs. There are unquestionably in Queensland to-day, to my knowledge and to the knowledge of most hon.

Mr. Elphinstone.]

members, actually instances of profiteering to a disquieting extent. I am going to refer a little later on to instances where combines exist to restrict trading in Queensland—I am sufficiently honest to admit that—but I am not going to admit that the whole of the high cost of living that exists to-day is due to the operations of profiteers, and if hon. members opposite are going to lead the people of Queensland to think that the institution of this court or commission of appeal is going to have the effect of reducing that cost of living to any appreciable extent, they are misleading themselves and the people. My object is to criticise the position fairly and squarely. I do not consider that any measure is likely to have any material effect on the cost of living. I will give my reasons for saying that. The chief reason is that the main influences which are in operation at the present time in enhancing the cost of materials which are used in everyday consumption lie outside of Queensland. Take the linen or woollen stuffs and so forth which are utilised in our ordinary wearing apparel. How much is made in Queensland? Hon. members know perfectly well that only a tiny percentage is made in Queensland.

Mr. WHITFORD interjected.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: Allow me to conduct my own speech; the hon. member can speak afterwards. The position is that you are suffering from the effects of profiteering which to-day exists in other parts of the world. The only influence any measure we pass can have on these imported goods in this country is the effect which the cost of making them up and distributing them has upon the cost to the consumer. Until Queensland produces more there is no more possibility of fixing the price of materials which go to make our everyday commodities than there is of our flying. I have often heard hon. members argue that whenever wages go up, up goes the cost of materials. So long as we are satisfied to import the finished article, and simply make that up into the particular garment we want, so long will the cost of wages immediately affect the ultimate cost, because all that we expend on the article is really the wages which are utilised in making it up and distributing it, and the influences which have been brought to bear to enhance the cost of that article were exerted before that article reached Queensland. Therefore, it is only in the wages and the distribution and retailing of that article that the Queensland influences can be felt. That is a point which hon. members opposite must remember.

Mr. WHITFORD: What would you say of a man who bought stuff before the war and sold it at 300 per cent. profit?

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: I will deal with that, but I hope that these interjections will not be taken off my time.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: I have just told the hon. member that if he will abide his soul in patience I will tell him something about the tailoring trade.

Mr. WHITFORD: I will tell you something you do not know.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: Possibly the hon. member can. For the reasons I have stated, I say that the establishment of any court such as is suggested here is going to have very little effect on the ultimate cost of a particular article in question. A great

[Mr. Elphinstone.

deal has been said about meat, bread, fish, milk, fruit, and groceries. My opinion is that this Bill is likely to be effective to a very slight extent in respect of those articles. The Minister, in introducing this measure, I think, mentioned condensed milk as being one of the commodities in regard to which a combine existed in Australia, and adversely affected the cost of living. Has he read the result of the investigations in New South Wales, where Judge Edmunds said that he had listened to all kinds of evidence from all quarters, and he saw none whatever which led him to think that there was anything else but a fair margin of profit on the production of condensed milk? The reason why I welcome this suggested court or commission is that it will give to the people of Queensland an opportunity of dissecting this matter, not building on false premises, because, if they think that they are going to have, through the introduction of this Bill, a reduction in the cost of living, I am satisfied they are going to be bitterly disappointed.

There is one sphere in which I think profiteering is rife in Queensland—that is, in women's apparel. We all know the feminine weaknesses of our community. Many women and girls see some particular article which takes their fancy. It is not a question of price or whether it comes within their means or not. They set their minds or hearts upon that little attractive article of feminine adornment, and they go for it and buy it. I will give you an actual example which happened in a Queen-street shop during the past three months. There were some silk stockings which this particular drapery firm had bought at a particularly favourable price, so that they were enabled to put them in the window marked 8s. 11d. a pair. They could not sell those articles—and the manager of the shop himself informed me of this—and the reason was that it appeared too cheap; people did not think that it was a right price to pay for silk stockings. So they marked the price up to 18s. 11d. for the same pair of stockings, and within a week every pair was sold out. That is an actual illustration which demonstrates my point, which is that it is the feminine weaknesses of this community which give the profiteer the opportunity to indulge to a very large extent in that direction. If the demand is there and the people insist on paying high prices, surely there is a certain amount of excuse for a profiteer under such circumstances. Let me ask hon. members how they would deal with the situation.

Groceries fill a very important part in our everyday life. You have a small grocer in Stanley street and a large one in Queen street with seven, eight, nine, or ten branches. We will say that soap is the particular article to be dealt with. The Commission says, "A penny a cake is a reasonable profit on soap." A penny a cake to the small grocer in Stanley street is a reasonable profit, but a penny a cake to the big grocer with ten branches is a small fortune. That is one of the difficulties which creep in when you attempt to fix prices. I should like to give an illustration in regard to tailoring, in which the hon. member for Burrum has so vital an interest. We will say, for the sake of argument, that he has when the war broke out 100 suit lengths which he had bought at pre-war prices. He can make those suit lengths up and sell at £6 6s. a suit, and make a reasonable profit. The hon. member knows that is what existed before the war broke out. But the war breaks out and up goes the cost

of material 100 per cent. Assuming that he sold those 100 suits at £6 6s., the position is that he has to pay twice the price for new stock when his stock is exhausted. It means that he has only sufficient capital return to buy fifty suit lengths at the enhanced price. He does so. Prices go up another 100 per cent. and consequently, when he has sold out his fifty suits, he has only got enough capital to buy twenty-five suit lengths at again the enhanced price. The hon. member knows as well as I do that is what has been happening. Further, when the prices come down, he is left with a stock on his hands, which cost him the top of the market price, and he has to incur a serious loss. The position shows that that particular tailor has to take into consideration when he is selling his stock what it is going to cost him to replenish that stock. Therefore, that man, who has got so many lengths which he can make up into suits at £6 6s. has to retail them at £10 10s. to give him sufficient capital to buy the same quantity of stock at the enhanced price.

Mr. CARTER: What a stupid argument?

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: Stupid to the hon. member for Port Curtis, because he does not understand it, but I venture to think that there are certain hon. members opposite whose intelligence will permit them to grasp the argument.

Mr. WHITFORD: You may know something about cement, but you do not know much about clothing.

Mr. CARTER: He does not know much about cement, yet he buried Darra in it. He cemented the company in it.

I am going on with my tailoring argument whether the hon. gentlemen opposite like it or not. There are certain tailors in Queensland to-day whose position is very difficult. There are large firms of tailors who have sufficient capital at their disposal to buy their stocks in the cheapest possible market under the most favourable conditions. There are other tailors in Queen street to-day who are in the hands of Southern and overseas woollen merchants. Honourable members opposite know that as well as I. They have to buy their stocks through these particular men and pay whatever price they care to ask. That creates the position that you have one firm of tailors quoting £7 7s. for a suit and another across the way quoting £10 10s. for the same suit. That is not necessarily evidence of profiteering. That is evidence of certain men having greater facilities to buy, being unfettered in their buying capacity. That shows the necessity once more for the establishment of some court or commission where these things can be ventilated and people can be given an opportunity of investigating the matter. To come down to another phase of the situation, hon. members opposite, in my judgment, are correct when they say that it is impossible to look for industrial peace under our present Arbitration Court system until some method is devised of stabilising the cost of living. There is no question about that. Any man who studies the position must admit that so long as the necessary commodities of life are continually bounding up and up, so long will we have perpetual unrest in the industrial class of the community. Therefore, every thinking man who is honest must try and devise some means of stabilising the cost of the necessary commodities of life.

Our efforts should be bent in that direction. There are two directions in which I think our efforts should be energetically directed with that object in view. It seems to me that those men who are capable of conferring upon this subject should discuss the question whether it is not possible to earmark a sufficient quantity of Queensland primary products to feed and clothe the people of Queensland at a reasonable cost and at a reasonable profit, rendering them free and unfettered by the fluctuating prices caused by the world's demands. It seems to me to be unreasonable to ask a worker to pay a high price for boots when he knows that the hide is produced in Queensland at a price which, if manufactured here, would permit him to purchase a pair of boots at a reasonable cost. It is all very well to tell that man that Queensland is benefiting by the fact of our selling our produce in the world's markets at the highest possible price. That is an indirect benefit which the average working man does not understand, and probably has little opportunity of appreciating. What he understands is that he is given a certain wage on which he has to live, and that wage was fixed upon commodities costing a certain figure. If those commodities are continually soaring, of course the man is continually perturbed and continually upset—in my judgment, reasonably so. I think our minds should be concentrated upon seeing if we cannot devise some means of stabilising the cost to the worker of those commodities which go to form the necessities of his life, particularly when the raw materials which are utilised in the manufacture of those commodities are produced in this State. Another point I want to touch upon is that there is a vast amount of waste going on in Queensland to-day in the method of distributing our necessary commodities. In the distribution of bread, of milk, of fruit, and of such like things, there is a waste going on which probably adds 20 per cent., 30 per cent., perhaps 40 per cent. to the cost of commodities. You see, for the sake of argument, districts where tradesmen are going over one another's steps. You see bakers' carts travelling over the same roads. I have seen it myself scores of times in the old country. I think I am right in saying that one of the first measures which was introduced at home when the war broke out was to stop this waste in distribution, with the result that each person had to go to a certain centre to secure his necessary commodities. Something of that description ought to be introduced here, because there is a terrible waste going on in the distribution of those necessary commodities of life. Can a man look at the fruit position to-day without being perturbed with what he finds? There is fruit which is produced and sold at a price which is a bare living in the ordinary course to the fruit producer. Yet, on the other hand, you have fruit consumers who are paying for that particular fruit a price which is staggering when it is compared with the price which the producer actually receives. I am not going to say that that is due to profiteering. I do not think it is. It is due to the inefficient distribution of fruit.

Mr. SMITH: Who gets the difference?

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: The hon. member for Mackay says, "Who gets the difference?"

Mr. SMITH: Wasteful distribution is only one factor.

Mr. Elphinstone.]

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: It is one very material factor. Take, for instance, perishable fruit like tomatoes, about which the hon. member for Bowen and I know a good deal. Tomatoes are bought and stocked by large numbers of small fruit shops in Brisbane. Each one of those shops has to make a certain profit on a limited turnover; further, it has to keep that stock for an indefinite period, which occasions considerable waste, with the result that they have to charge a considerably enhanced price to make up for the loss by waste and the small turnover out of which they have to make a living. Some system has to be devised of making distribution more perfect, to enable the consumer to get the commodities of life which are necessary for him in a way which is not going to be any curtailment of the opportunities of the people, but rather is going to enhance them. It is going to give the consumer an opportunity of getting the necessities of life at a price which his limited means permit him to enjoy. There is one point which I do not think any hon. member in this debate has touched upon regarding the cost of living, and that is the question of inflated currency. We must remember that during this war the whole financial situation of the world has gone through a very important transitory stage, and it has arrived at a point when there is far more money in circulation than there ever has been in the world's history. On the other hand, there is very much less production. There are more buyers with more money, and on the other hand less production. The result, of course, is that you have two people, or three people, now asking for the one article, whereas before the war there was one article for one person. The competition of those three people to obtain that one article means that the cost of that article is enhanced. That is the rule of supply and demand, and you cannot get away from it. If our efforts are bent upon increasing that production so that we can supply the enhanced currency which exists to-day, we will reduce the cost of living. Let me illustrate my point. Why is it that cabbages are fetching about 2s. each in the market to-day? It is simply because there are more people asking for cabbages than there are cabbages with which to supply them? If there were twice the number of cabbages in the morning to what there are, the prices would probably go down 50 per cent. Therefore, it comes back to the one point which we on this side of the House are always preaching—so long as you discourage production so long will the present state of affairs exist as regards the high cost of living. Let me give an illustration which hon. members opposite will possibly follow. This Government during the last twelve months, I think I am right in saying, have spent some £2,000,000 on railway construction. That £2,000,000 has been disseminated throughout the community in wages and cost of materials. Therefore, that goes into the market and is spent. Now that £2,000,000—or rather, the railway which is represented by that £2,000,000—is not immediately productive. That £2,000,000 has been thrust upon the community without having the necessary production behind it. Had it been put into direct use, which could immediately produce something, it could be utilised in purchasing that which was produced thereby. It will be years before that railway becomes productive.

[Mr. Elphinstone.

Therefore, the result of that £2,000,000 expenditure is not apparent. If that had been spent on irrigation, and the result had been increased crops and increased production generally, the cost of living would have come down, because there would have been something on which to spend it. That is a point of view which is well worth considering, and it is a point of view which should influence Ministers in the expenditure of money for the development of Queensland. It is a most important point which has a bearing on the position in all parts of the world at the present moment. I referred earlier in my speech to the danger of combines. It is rather remarkable that no hon. member opposite in his condemnation of the combines which exist to-day has made any reference to the biggest combine that there is probably in the world, and that is the licensed liquor combine? Why is it that hon. members opposite have not pointed to the existence of that combine? Have they not got an illustration of what that combine did to a publican in Brisbane some two years ago when he dared to refuse to raise the price of liquor at its dictates? Hon. members know perfectly well that the man was victimised at every turn, that scouts and spies were put out to stop him getting supplies, but the man was too strong and ultimately he was bought out by the trade. That is the biggest combine that exists in Brisbane to-day, and yet not one hon. member opposite has had the temerity to refer to it. The significance of the omission is enlightening. I will refer to a combine in the motor trade which is supposed to support the Opposition. In my judgment it is a very undesirable combine. I dislike combines. I think we should all have freedom to trade and do as we like. In the motor trade to-day—and I am interested in it—would hon. members opposite be surprised if I told them I cannot go into probably twenty or thirty shops and buy anything at all because I refused to join the combine?

Mr. FOLEY: They must know you too well.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: Do hon. members know that some of the biggest shops where hitherto I could purchase anything, because I refused to join a combine will not sell me a tin tack.

Mr. FOLEY: Well! Well!

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: The hon. member says "Well, well." Poor little, limited mind. He does not see the significance of that. Probably he is getting too old.

Mr. FOLEY: I can go into any shop in Queensland, and get anything I want, if I have the money.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: Because the hon. member is a capitalist. I am not. He is a landed proprietor, I am a poor, struggling individual. That is the position. I say the establishment of any Commission that is going to have the object of giving the people the opportunity of testing the real validity of these profiteering Acts should also stop the operations of undesirable combines.

There are some desirable ones, [8 p.m.] bear that in mind. There are some industries which could not exist to-day if it were not for a combine; which have had to combine with a view to effecting economies in distribution and in working. Don't think I am condemning the lot. But there are some combines which exist

in Queensland which should have their wings cut. I can see no reason why any man should not have the liberty to buy an article where he likes, and for him to be restricted simply because he refuses to join in a combine which has for its objective the restriction of trade and the raising of prices is not right. It is rather remarkable that the Government itself has been busily engaged in profiteering. I have heard references to the cost of living in this House, but members opposite are always silent on the profiteering that goes on on the part of the Government itself, especially on the question of timber. (Hear, hear!) To refer to this article, whereas five years ago we could produce logs at 7s. per 100 superficial feet, to-day you have got to pay 19s. per 100 superficial feet to the Government for that same quality of timber. That is nearly three times as much for that same timber as compared with five years ago. That has had the effect of adding 50 per cent. to the cost of a house. These are statements which I make without fear of contradiction. Yet hon. members opposite complain of the cost of living when they know that the Government expressly and by their own instrumentality caused the price of timber to go up.

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

Mr. SOMERSET (*Stantley*): I beg to move—

“That the hon. member for Oxley be further heard.”

Question put and passed.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: I have to thank the House for its consideration. This is a point I persistently refer to, because we all know that the problem before Queensland to-day is the housing problem. We all know that the only way of solving that problem is to give every worker a roof over his head and a garden where he will be able to enjoy some happiness in life. Whilst the Government is pointing the finger of scorn at the profiteer, and while the Government is introducing legislation which has for its object the housing of the people, here is the Government on the other hand charging, and being instrumental in charging, two and a-half times as much for timber to-day as it was five years ago.

Mr. FOLEY: Don't you know the reason for that?

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: Yes; because the Government sees an opportunity of making money out of its timber, and seizes it. The Government sees an opportunity of making £100,000 or more out of its timber, and that is why they are charging the increased royalty. In this matter the Government is looking for motes in the eyes of the profiteer outside, but first of all the Government should ascertain what the beam is doing in its own eye. A good deal has been said about shipping. During the currency of the war shipping freights on the Queensland coast were not increased at all.

Mr. SMITH: They were increased.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: They were not.

Mr. SMITH: The shipping companies increased their freights, but a regulation of the Navy Department caused it to be withdrawn.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: I am saying that, so far as shipping freights on the Queensland coast are concerned, they were not increased during the war. I am not saying what the shipping companies intended to do. There is no use denying the fact that a good deal of the increased cost of living in Queensland is due to the oversea shipping companies. We have only to look at their balance-sheets, and particularly the balance-sheets of the Japanese shipping companies. I remember looking through the balance-sheet of one Japanese shipping company, and I saw that they made a profit of £2,500,000 in one year out of a capital of £1,500,000. That was a company trading between Japan and Australia, and it is a most iniquitous state of affairs that we should be called upon to pay such enormous freights for the introduction of goods into Queensland as the outcome of the war. Anything that is going to control the freights overseas is going to have a material bearing upon the position in Queensland. How is this Commission going to control that situation? It simply shows that, when the Federal Parliament asked for powers to control the situation, it is doing something which we, as reasonable men, ought to assist it to get. As a State we cannot control these things, and it is a matter which ought to be controlled by the Federal Government. Therefore, when the powers asked for by the Federal Parliament are granted, as I hope they will be, this Bill will become inoperative. When the Profiteering Bill was introduced in England, what were the remarks made in regard to it? I find that the Bill was only introduced for a period of six months, because the Minister in charge of it knew perfectly well that it could only act as a palliative and be no positive cure. There is no legislative cure for profiteering. There is no cure for the high cost of living other than competition. Production and competition are two things which will bring about the natural cure, and it is only when competition and production are upset by an upheaval such as we passed through during the past five years that we find the position as it is to-day. If we would only bend our energies upon production, and get the people to engage in secondary industries, then, instead of the disturbing evil which already exists, we will find a permanent cure to meet the present situation. I must admit that the establishment of this Commission is necessary, as it will give those who do not understand the position, and who do not understand the ins and outs of the causes which go to make for profiteering and the high cost of living, it will give them an opportunity of understanding the situation, and it will also give the workers an opportunity of appreciating the difficulty and making them more content. The president of the British Board of Trade, in introducing the Profiteering Bill in the House of Commons, said that the suspicion of profiteering is creating social unrest, and materially contributing to the disturbance and disorganisation of industrial life. So long as we have not some means of stabilising the cost of commodities in Queensland, manufactured from products which we raise ourselves in Queensland, then there will be trouble. I commend two things to this House. I hope this Commission will be established. I believe it is necessary that everything relating to the cost of living should be inquired into thoroughly and

Mr. Elphinstone.

efficiently. In Queensland and Australia we must have some means of turning out our raw material into the finished article at a reasonable cost of production and at a reasonable profit, so that our working classes can buy these commodities without being subject to violent fluctuations in price, which go a long way towards disturbing them in their industrial life as it exists at the present moment.

Mr. WHITFORD (*Burrum*): I desire to say a few words in connection with this matter, particularly after hearing the hon. member for Oxley. I notice that the hon. member for Oxley is a tailor, a timber-worker, a cement-worker—as a matter of fact, he is an all-round man. The hon. gentleman reminds me of the saying—

“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

The hon. gentleman has rushed in on the particular question of tailoring. I claim to know, at least, something about tailoring. The hon. gentleman says that there is no doubt that profiteering exists in the tailoring trade, but he did not say that the profiteering was on the merchant's side, and not on the retail tailor's side. The retail tailor to-day is in the unfortunate position that he is at the mercy of the importer. I can assure this House that the suit which I could make for £5 5s. in 1914 you will have to pay £12 12s. for to-day. I want to know where the rise comes in. It comes from the combines and monopolies, including the shipping combine. The materials are imported from the old country to Australia. This country is largely dependent on imported materials so far as tailoring is concerned. A high freight has to be paid on the shipping, and also a high insurance. It is to the combines that we can attribute the high cost of everything to-day. I have a few figures here which I quoted some time ago to show the increase in the price of clothing. I quoted where blouses were imported from Japan in 1914 for 12s. 6d. per dozen, and they were sold that year at 2s. 11d. each. In 1915 that particular firm were not anxious to sell, but offered the blouses at 7s. 6d. apiece. In 1916 the price went up to 12s. 6d. apiece.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: And your Government looking on.

Mr. WHITFORD: No; the man who won the war was looking on. The little fellow you heard the other day, who was supposed to win the war, was looking after the prices, and you know it. In 1917 the firm I refer to was selling the blouses at 17s. 6s. apiece, and in 1918 the price went up to £1 2s. 6d. apiece for blouses that cost only 1s. 0½d. each. One man who had the impudence to sign himself “Draper” wrote to two daily papers and said that in 1914 the blouses buttoned up to the chin, and naturally they could not sell the same blouses in 1918, because the 1918 blouses were buttoned down to zero. I don't know exactly what “zero” means. (Laughter.) How much would it cost to alter a blouse buttoned up at the chin? It would cost about 6d. for each blouse, and yet look at the price they sold the blouses for. That is where your profiteering comes in. I have some figures here in connection with Japanese prices. Don't forget—“Japanese” prices. My friend was talking about the

Japanese some time ago. However, here are some of the Japanese prices—

FIRST SELECTED AMERICAN—CHOICE QUALITY.

Inch.	M/M	White.			Black.		
		Sept. 1918.	Sept. 1919.	Sept. 1918.	Sept. 1918.	Sept. 1919.	
20	3½	0 5¼	...	0 6	...	...
24	4	0 7	...	0 7¼	...	...
27	4½	0 8½	...	0 10	...	...
27	5	0 9½	1 11	2 6	0 11	2 2	
27	5½	0 10½	...	0 11½	...	...
27	6	1 0	2 2	2 9	1 1½	2 5	
27	6½	1 1½	2 5	3 0	1 3½	2 8½	
27	7	1 2½	2 7½	3 4	1 5	3 3	
27	7½	1 3½	2 10	3 8	1 7¼	3 7	
27	8	1 4½	3 0	3 8	1 7¼	3 7	
27	8½	1 5½	3 3	3 8	1 7¼	3 7	
27	9	1 6½	3 6	4 1	1 8¾	3 10½	
27	9½	1 7½	3 7½	4 1	1 8¾	3 10½	
27	10	1 8½	3 9	4 11	2 1	4 6	
27	11	1 9½	4 3	4 11	2 1	4 6	
27	12	1 11	4 3	4 11	2 1	4 6	
27	14	2 4	4 9	...	2 5	5 0	
27	16	2 7½	...	...	2 10	...
27	20	3 8½	...	...	...	...

Those are Japanese goods sold to merchants or importers here.

I think the average man will admit that the time-payment system in regard to the drapery business is robbery to the person who buys. A good number of people—particularly about the city—go in for what they call £4 or £5 orders. They pay so much down to an agent, who also gets commission from the merchant with whom he is dealing. The agent gives his order on the firm, or, perhaps, for the sake of argument I will say, McWhirter, Foy and Gibson, Finney Isles, or any of those firms. The time-payment system is worked by the large drapery houses in Brisbane—not only Brisbane, but all over Australia. On a £5 order a person pays 5s. deposit. They go to the establishment and buy at the ordinary retail price; but before they have paid for their £5 order the material is worn out. They are absolutely robbed. It is nearly time the Government put their foot down and stopped this kind of thing. I say that, because I know that the average working man to-day, who has an ordinary miserable pittance—a married man with a family—would naturally like to see his wife and children clothed properly. If he had a fair and reasonable wage, there would be no occasion for this kind of illegal trading to be done by the business people of Brisbane. They employ agents and collectors to go round in motor-cars and motor-cycles, and pay them commission on all they collect, which clearly shows that there is a vast amount of profit in it. The sooner this kind of thing is stopped the better. (Hear, hear!) Take Horrocks's calico, for instance. In 1915 there were large stocks cabled for, causing it to rise in price—naturally! The local price was 4½d. landed, and 4s. 9d. dozen retail. The Government taking all the cotton for munition purposes, the price rose to 1s. 7d. I have bought many and many a yard of Horrocks's calico at 4s. 11d. a dozen, and to-day it would cost me at least 18s. a dozen—that is for No. 1. The price in London is 1s. 3d. a yard. The standard for the retailers here is 1s. 6d. I do not know where the ordinary working man is going to land himself if this continues. This Bill should have not only the support of this side of

[Mr. Elphinstone.

the House, but also the support of the Opposition. I really believe—although the hon. member for Oxley spoke as he did—that his intention is to support the Bill, but I suppose, from the fact that as the main portion of the Opposition are against it, he will naturally have to join them.

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: You think he means well?

MR. WHITFORD: I think so, but he is afraid to say so.

MR. BEBBINGTON: You are a false prophet.

MR. WHITFORD: Do not judge me by yourself. I think that the hon. gentleman who has just resumed his seat means well, but, unfortunately, he is afraid to support the Bill owing to the fact that the Opposition will be up against him.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: Do you think the "Courier" might give him a dressing down?

MR. WHITFORD: We know the "Daily Standard" will give him credit for it. In the event of this Bill being passed, it is going to be a very fine benefit to the workers of Queensland, which this Government stands for; and I am going to support it. (Hear, hear!)

At twenty minutes past 8 o'clock p.m.,

MR. POLLOCK, one of the temporary chairmen, took the chair as Deputy Speaker.

HON. J. G. APPEL (*Albert*): The hon. member for Oxley is to be complimented on giving such an admirable exposition of the economic position and the laws relating thereto, so far as they relate to the measure now being discussed.

MR. WELLINGTON: Also the member for Burrum.

HON. J. G. APPEL: I agree, as far as the hon. member for Burrum is concerned, that that is so. The leader of the Opposition, in his criticism of the Bill, put the matter very clearly from a non-partisan point of view. Every member of the community, whether engaged in our secondary industries or as a primary producer, must realise that, as far as profiteering or the existence of monopolies is concerned, it is detrimental to the general interests of the community; and we are all of one mind on the question as to whether or not action should be taken where these evils exist. To my mind, the point is: Has the Minister, in introducing this measure, realised the position clearly? Is the measure calculated to effect the object at which it is aimed? I recollect when the present Administration and their supporters sat in Opposition, they criticised legislation which was introduced by the then Government. I recollect how they appealed that legislation should be simplified, and that measures should be so drawn that they could be understood by every member of the community.

MR. COLLINS: Hear, hear! I say "Hear, hear!" again.

HON. J. G. APPEL: I am very glad to hear that interjection, and I only regret that the member has been unable to prevail on the executive of his party to follow out the desire which they then expressed, because a more cumbersome, crude, tyrannical measure has never been placed before this House

before. How many members of this House understand the different sections in that Bill?

MR. WHITFORD: A few do.

HON. J. G. APPEL: There may be a few, and I am very glad to hear it. If there are but a few members of this House who are able to understand it, with their knowledge and experience gained in this House, how many members of the community can be expected to understand it?

MR. WHITFORD: We will teach them.

HON. J. G. APPEL: I trust there will be no necessity for the instructions being given to the members of the community because, while quite in accord with any legislation which will attain the object which we all desire to see attained, in my opinion, this measure will not do so. The Minister, from his partisan standpoint, no doubt made a very excellent speech in support of the second reading, but it was absolutely partisan. It is on a par with legislation which has been introduced by the present Administration—and, by the way—I presume that this measure has been duly submitted to the executive of the junta of Turbot street, and received their approval. (Government laughter.) Might I accept that as having been duly done, Mr. Speaker—their consent given to the present Administration to introduce it?

THE SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: No wonder you say people won't understand the Bill if you think that.

HON. J. G. APPEL: I doubt if the hon. gentleman himself is prepared to give an exposition of this measure. The Minister in charge of the Bill spoke of the hostility of the anti-Labour Press. I have seen no evidence of hostility in the Press, nor has there been hostility expressed by individual members, or by the Opposition collectively. I have already referred to the criticism of the leader of the Opposition, who simply—while admitting that it was necessary that legislation should be enacted—criticised the measure from a non-partisan standpoint as being cumbersome, tyrannical, and ineffective. As is usual with all legislation introduced by the present Administration, it proposes to create another bureaucracy—another department, a specific provision being made that no member of the Legislature shall be appointed as the head of this department. I assume that the outside partisans of the party have come to the conclu-

[8.30 p.m.] sion that too many of the sweets have gone to the members of the Legislature and now desire to participate in any future offices. Possibly, that provision is an addition made by the junta when they revised the Bill and before they returned it to the Executive with their approval and permission to present it to the Assembly.

Reference has been made to our State enterprises by different speakers, and I want to know whether they have assisted in bringing down the cost of living materially. We have had evidence given by the hon. member for Carnarvon, who showed that the price of meat had increased—that, despite the fact that meat is commandeered from the meat companies at a lower price than that at which it can be purchased by a proprietary butcher, the price of meat has never gone down. We know that is a fact. Yet we find that the cattle which are raised upon the State stations, and which a majority of

Hon. J. G. Appel.]

the thoughtless public of Queensland believe are raised for the purpose of supplying our State shops, are not used for that purpose but for the purpose of obtaining the highest price possible in the State or other markets. And yet this is the only enterprise, according to the Auditor-General's report, by which a profit has been made. Why should a profit be made? We have here an Administration who profess a desire to safeguard the public of Queensland from increased prices and an enhanced cost of living. Yet we find that they are retailing the meat which they have practically seized from the meatworks at a profit—the only profit which has been made as a result of any of the State enterprises—and that the cattle from the State stations, in which they have embarked something over £1,000,000 sterling, are not being applied to the purpose of securing cheap meat to the people. We find also that the hides from the cattle raised upon those stations are not being sold in the State at a fixed rate, which would enable the tanner to produce leather at a lower price than the ruling rate, and thus enable the manufacturer to produce footwear at a cheaper level than we find to-day, but are rather being sold to the highest bidders, whether they are in the State or outside the State. Under those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I think you yourself must admit that a suspicion must arise in the minds of any thinking individuals that the Administration are not bona fide in their intention, first of all, to endeavour to reduce the cost of living, and in the second instance to get at the profiteer, and in the third instance to abolish monopolies which are not for the benefit of the community. We all know that that worn-out cry of the present Administration and their supporters of cheap food is undoubtedly one which misled the people. Unfortunately, the people have not the opportunities of viewing and hearing hon. members who are sitting behind the Government, or who are members of the Administration. Just as a costermonger induces his donkey to move forward by shaking a bunch of carrots before its nose, so are the public of Queensland being misled, so are they being drawn into the spider-web of the present Administration by that worn-out old cry of cheap food. Just as a man, even by means of shaking in a tin dish some barren stones, is able to catch his horse, so were the present Administration able to catch the people of Queensland. And what is more emblematic—what is more typical—of the policy and administration of the Labour party sitting in government than barren stones rattling in an empty tin dish? They are absolutely typical of their policy, and I trust that as the old horse may be once misled, may be twice misled, but who a third time is not misled, so the people of Queensland will be found no longer to be misled by the present Administration and their supporters by barren stones rattled in an empty tin dish—so emblematic and descriptive of their policy.

Take the fish supply. To-day fish is a luxury. It was contended by hon. members, when they appealed to the public and secured their sympathies because of the parrot cries which they uttered of cheap food, that fish, of all our articles of consumption, should be of the cheapest—that it was a food found in plenty. They have embarked on the fish industry a very large amount of money.

[Hon. J. G. Appel.

They have undertaken the purchase of a trawler. I am not going to say that the purchase of a trawler is not, perhaps, a good thing for exploration work, but, to my mind, before embarking upon the purchase of so valuable a vessel, one sufficiently adequate for exploration work should have been obtained. I am sure that the maintenance of this trawler must cost not one penny less than £10,000 per annum, with its crew and fuel and equipment. What has it done or likely to do? The other day a fortnight's trawling resulted in fish to the value of something like £300 odd. What are hon. members who raise these parrot cries of profiteering doing themselves in forcing up food prices? I find that the price paid to fishermen for mullet is 9s. 6d.

Mr. BERTRAM: Is that too much?

HON. J. G. APPEL: It is not too much, but they are depriving the fisherman of what is justly his, and charging 14s. 10d. to the consumer.

HON. W. H. BARNES: Who are the mullet?

Mr. KIRWAN: Who are the flathead?

HON. J. G. APPEL: Both the fishermen and the public of Queensland, who were misled by that worn-out gramophone cheap food cry of the present Administration and their followers. We have, then, the fact that they gave the fishermen 8s. for black bream and charge the public 10s. 10d. We have members sitting on the other side who countenance this sort of thing; countenance, first of all, a smaller price to the fisherman than is his due, and who, having defrauded the fisherman of what is justly his, turn round and defraud the public of the benefit of the cheaper price in an endeavour to make a profit. At the expense of whom? Of the consumer! That is an illustration of how they are endeavouring to persuade members of this House, who are endeavouring to persuade the people of Queensland, that they are opposed to profiteering—they who are the chiefest offenders in profiteering! I know there are members on the other side who have taken a very considerable amount of interest in reading economic and political works, but, unfortunately, it is in the application of their reading that they fail. I have seen in this House instances where members have read—not studied—an article, say, on political economy by Mill, but they select only portions of the theory which he has evolved, portions which they believe will suit them, and they then present them to this House and the public as the theory and principles which have been evolved by that noted writer. They gaily, without any practical experience, are prepared to enter into all kinds of enterprises which require knowledge, energy, and initiative. And I might just as well point out to members who are so fond of quoting Mill that in the article he specially points out the inadvisability of an Administration's entering into the conduct of private enterprises, pointing out that the government of the State is quite sufficient for their energies and the time at their command. And reading the Auditor-General's report, we have absolute confirmation of what Mill has stated about such a move on the part of the Government, about coming into competition with the public who have the energy, the enterprise, and the knowledge necessary in these matters. The hon. member for Burrum

quoted that old saw: "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Aye, fools do rush in. The hon. member for Oxley instanced our State sawmills. What have the State sawmills done in connection with reducing the price of timber?

Mr. HARTLEY: Made something over £2,000 profit last year.

HON. J. G. APPEL: It is a disgrace to them, making a profit and not decreasing the cost of the timber to the workers who desire to have homes. It is a disgrace and a scandal. It is well that the public of Queensland should know that the members who profess to be their friends are boasting that the State sawmills made a profit of £2,000 at the expense of the unfortunate worker who desires to have his own roof over his head. I saw to-day a paragraph that that great kauri pine, known as "Bell's tree," had been sold for £200. It was stated with pride that a few years ago £6 had been offered as the value of that tree. To-day the present Administration, who say they are out to reduce the cost of living, to reduce the price of timber, are boasting of the fact that a tree which before the war was worth £6 was sold by them for £200. Now, can we possibly expect to get cheap timber when the Administration are demanding such an immense price for one tree? I repeat again you have only to consult the report of the Auditor-General upon the financial management of the Government, and of State enterprises, and upon those State enterprises themselves. Then, can we conclude that the Administration—profiteers themselves to the most superlative degree—are honest in this measure which they are bringing forward, and which proposes to deal with profiteers and with monopolists? The Minister made a point of the fact that the cost of living had increased 60 odd per cent.—the highest increase in any of the States of the Commonwealth. What is the good of saying that that rise is due to the Commonwealth? As has been pointed out, the Commonwealth governs the whole of the States of Australia.

Mr. HARTLEY: They fixed the whole of the prices during the war.

HON. J. G. APPEL: If this were due to the Commonwealth Government, then the increase in the cost of living would be equal in all the States of the Commonwealth, but we find in those States which are administered by the National party, which are administered by sane finance, that the cost has been less. Where it is administered by a party who are absolutely inept so far as finance is concerned, the increase has been greatest of any of the States of the Commonwealth. The Minister pointed out, I think, that the wage-earner was 11 points behind still. Everyone who has the smallest amount of business knowledge must realise that as wages rise so must the cost of production go up. That is but natural. The State itself, when entering upon an enterprise to make a profit—and they have not made much profit—must take into consideration the capital which is involved and the expense of producing the particular article. Unquestionably, one of the factors in increased cost of living is the increase in the wages of those who are assisting in the production of the article. There is one thing that the Minister forgot, and that is this—the present Administration claim to be scientific taxers. The Treasurer referred to his taxation measures as being measures of scientific

taxation. I think every member of the community who has had this enormous increase of taxation—I think it is 80 per cent.—since the present Administration have been in power realises that it is scientific. There is not one member of the community who is taking an interest in the settlement and advancement of the State who is not affected by that scientific taxation. Under former Administrations, where an individual purchased a piece of ground on extended terms of payment, an agreement of sale was made, and it was required that a stamp of 2s. 6d. should be affixed to that agreement, the whole amount of stamp duty being paid when the papers were completed and the actual transfer took place. The present Administration have taken very good care that no future Administration shall receive any stamp duty from any of those transactions, because they now require that when an agreement of sale is made, although the purchase money has not been paid—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I hope the hon. member will connect his remarks with the Bill.

HON. J. G. APPEL: I am simply endeavouring to exemplify the fact that the present Government are profiteers, and as profiteers they cannot be *bonâ fide* in this measure which they have presented to this House. Now, what is a profiteer? I have heard several attempts made in this House to describe what a profiteer is.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: If Elijah were here he would be a profiteer.

HON. J. G. APPEL: He went up to heaven. The hon. gentleman's Ministry is supposed to be a heaven-descended Ministry. They descended; he ascended. The Minister, in speaking of what he termed the profiteers—the mercantile community, the middlemen, the merchants, and commercial men interested in our secondary industries—described them as being "pernicious combinations, harpies, vampires, and commercial cormorants." He also referred to "the wolfish visage of monopolies." He certainly described the present Administration. When we realise that we and the workers of this State owe a great debt of gratitude to the merchants, not alone in the Commonwealth of Australia, but in the Empire—

Mr. COLLINS: What for?

HON. J. G. APPEL: That shows what a shallow student of economics the hon. member must be. Addison wrote in the "Spectator" of a visit which he paid to the Stock Exchange in London, and described his feelings when he saw the merchants of the Empire conferring and doing business with men from all parts of the earth. He spoke of the magnitude of the transactions which took place between them and the inhabitants of other parts of the world; the immense sums which, owing to their knowledge of business, they were able to handle for the benefit of the community; the rich argosies which went forth to different lands with articles manufactured by the workers of Great Britain, and distributed those manufactured articles, and brought from those distant countries the wealth of primary produce which, being brought to the Empire, afforded employment to the workers of that Empire, resulting in the bringing of wealth to the whole community. Then we find men.

Hon. J. G. Appel.]

shallow readers, who talk in that strain of the merchants of Great Britain, who were the Empire-builders. Unquestionably we to-day, members of the Empire in this great southland of Australia, are indebted to the members of the mercantile community for the benefits which we are enjoying.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: How did they treat their sailors?

HON. J. G. APPEL: Well, the seamen of Great Britain were men of which any community might be proud.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: They were treated very badly.

HON. J. G. APPEL: The shipping companies were referred to as having made immense profits.

The SECRETARY FOR RAILWAYS: Hear, hear!

HON. J. G. APPEL: The Minister says, "Hear, hear." I would like him to conduct the railways if he had a free hand and was not subject to a junta. He would make them pay. I give the hon. gentleman credit that he is a man who could conduct a business if he had a free hand. I know he would conduct the affairs of the shipping companies in exactly the same way in which they are being conducted—and that is, that they might be so managed that they would not involve a loss upon those who have invested their savings in their shares. Unfortunately, some men will not exercise their brains. We have to realise that to-day the life of a steel ship is not more than twenty-five years as a first-class ship. The vessels which are being used, not alone on our oversea but on our coastal traffic, are of quite a different character and value to those which were employed a few years ago; a vessel employed on our coast, if she is to return any profit on the cost of her construction, is a vessel which might average up to 10,000 tons, which to-day will cost something like £200,000, if not more. These companies, in conducting their businesses, must make a sufficient amount of profit to cover renewals which they have to make. Yet, without examining into the matter at all, hon. members take the gross profit, and say, "Look at the immense profits that are being made by the shipping companies." Then the Colonial Sugar Refining Company was referred to. I know, as a matter of fact, that on the South Johnstone there are different sugar mills, but amongst them is one which is the property of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company and another is a State mill. The Commission has limited the areas in which each mill is to operate. I want to know how is it that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company can give 5s. a ton more for cane than can the Government mill? It is a fact that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company were paying 5s. a ton more for cane than was paid by the Government mill. I want to know why? It was because the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's mill was operated efficiently, and they could make a profit while the State mill made a loss.

Mr. SMITH: The State mill pays more than the private mill.

[Hon. J. G. Appel.]

At 9 o'clock p.m.,

The SPEAKER resumed the chair.

HON. J. G. APPEL: I cannot conceive that the Government, or the members sitting behind them, are honest or *bonâ fide* in this matter. I signified my intention of scrutinising this Bill to see if any provision had been made to safeguard the primary producers of the State. There is absolutely no provision made in the Bill to safeguard the interests of the primary producer. The co-operative associations are threatened by this Bill. The sole object of the Bill is simply to safeguard at any cost one class of the community. Hon. members preach what they call "class consciousness." They say that the class they represent are the only members of the community fit to administer the affairs of the community. The primary producer and the workers in the secondary industries must be subject to that one class.

Mr. GLEDSON: They are all workers.

HON. J. G. APPEL: That is the object of this measure. That is admitted by interjections of hon. members opposite.

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member has exceeded the time allowed by the Standing Orders.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. W. N. Gillies, *Eacham*): I desire to make a few remarks on this Bill. First of all, I tender my earnest congratulations to the Minister for Public Works on the able manner in which he introduced this Bill and the statesmanlike way in which he dealt with the evils it is hoped it will remedy. The criticism of the measure so far does not require much replying to. I am going to reply to some of them and to point out the necessity for the measure, and to touch upon the difficulties of price-fixing. Price-fixing is no new thing so far as private price-fixing is concerned in the interest of rings and combines. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, there is as much need for this measure in Australia as in any part of the world. Personally, I have suffered greatly from price-fixing under the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, and it was left to a Labour Minister in the person of yourself to introduce a price-fixing measure which has opened the eyes of Australia; and the sugar-growers have learned to see the justice of that measure, which has put tens of thousands in their pockets. We have not heard hon. members opposite protest against price-fixing of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, but we know quite well that at one time the Colonial Sugar Refining Company paid their men £1 2s. 6d. a week, and paid the sugar-grower 13s. 6d. a ton for his cane. At one time I received as low as 1s. 6d. a ton for cane myself. We never hear members opposite protest against that sort of price-fixing. When it is attempted to regulate prices in the interests of the producers we hear the wails of the Tories and so-called friends of the producers against price-fixing. No one has suffered more than the farmer over high prices, freight, machinery, iron, fencing-wire, groceries, clothing, etc. The hon. member for Oxley and the hon. member

for Albert also had something to say about the price-fixing of timber, and about the price of royalties fixed by the present Minister for Lands. I desire to say that the present Minister for Lands deserves the thanks of the people of this State for having at least so regulated the royalties as to receive the full measure of the value of the timber less the cost of delivery of the timber at the mill. I am quite satisfied of this: That, if the Minister for Lands reduced the royalty by 100 per cent. or 200 per cent., the people who use the timber would not get it any cheaper. This has to be borne in mind: That while Liberal Governments in the past allowed the first crop, which took 150 years to grow, to be destroyed by fire or handed over to the timber combine, the present Minister for Lands is the first Minister to attempt to conserve the people's asset in the form of timber. Our fast-diminishing crops of timber should be preserved, not so much for the present generation, but in order to keep something for posterity. I think he deserves well at the hands of the people of Queensland for having made an attempt to save some of our fast-diminishing forests by so adjusting the royalty as to make the people who buy the logs pay value at the stump less the cost of delivery at the mill. That is the system of royalty adopted by the Minister for Lands, and it is the system that will have the effect of conserving some of the fast-diminishing forests in Queensland. We imagine, many of us, that Queensland is a great timber country as compared with other countries. Queensland is not a great timber country, and we are finding it out now. The present Minister for Lands has realised that, and he has endeavoured against great opposition to conserve some of our forests. Germany, France, and other parts of the world conserve from 12 per cent. to 30 per cent. of their areas as timber forests, while in Australia less than 2 per cent. is conserved for forestry purposes. I want to pass on to deal with some of the criticisms of this Bill. The criticism of the leader of the Opposition, Mr. Macartney, practically amounts to this—(1) That Mr. Larcombe has not produced specific instances of profiteering; (2) that the Control of Trade Act was not used by this Government prior to the commencement of Commonwealth price-fixing, and that it could be used now, because the Commonwealth regulations have been repealed (this item amounts to an attack on the sincerity of the Government in introducing the Profiteering Prevention Bill); (3) that a Royal Commission should be appointed to find out whether there is any profiteering in Queensland; (4) that the remedy for the high cost of living is increased production. The fact remains that profiteering does exist in Queensland, and the object of this Bill is to appoint a permanent commission which will be created as soon as the Bill has been passed. It will be the duty of the Commissioner, under this Bill, to locate the individual cases, not the Minister. The commission will have sufficient power to find out if there is any profiteering, what are the causes of it, and will attempt to deal with it. With regard to the second charge of the leader of the Opposition that the Control of Trade Act

is not used by the Government, I want to point out, first of all, that the Control of Trade Act, as Mr. Denham's speech on page 654 of "Hansard" indicates, is a war measure. He said there that the Bill will become operative by proclamation and will be operative during the war, and it would be rescinded by proclamation on the declaration of peace.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Has it been rescinded yet?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: No; but will on the passage of this more comprehensive measure.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Then, it is still in force.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: We are doing something which will have a greater force than that measure. The Control of Trade Act was purely a price-fixing Bill, and a purely price-fixing Bill will not succeed. I have not a great deal of faith in price-fixing myself as a permanent solution of this great world problem. I am like the Sydney "Bulletin," which says that the politician who claims to remedy the high cost of living by price fixation alone is either a fool or a knave. This is an honest attempt to fix fair prices and deal with combines and monopolies. That is the most essential feature of this Bill. The Bill passed by the Liberal Government does not deal with combines and monopolies. When this Bill becomes law, naturally the Necessary Commodities Bill will be repealed. That is a brief reply to argument No. 2. In regard to the appointment of a Royal Commission it is quite in keeping with the hon. gentleman to say that "if profiteering exists it should be dealt with." What a comfort to the worker with a large family these words must convey. He asks that a Royal Commission should be appointed to see if it is here. We know that it is here. We have ample evidence to know that profiteering is here and that something must be done. A Government that remains inactive and does not attempt to deal with this great world problem does not deserve to remain in power. That deals briefly with argument No. 3 that a Royal Commission should be appointed to deal with the question. I notice that Mr. Hughes on his way out from England made a speech at Durban, in which he said—

"Every day the cost of living was rising; with every rise in wages there was an increase in the cost of living. There were two classes of enemy in society, the Bolshevik and the profiteer. He spoke for those who had nothing to do with either, and said, 'Damn them both.'"

He says, "Damn them both." Mr. Hughes, on the 2nd September, 1919, is reported as having made use of the following words:—

"I ask myself why is industrial unrest greater now than it was before the war, and I am forced to the conclusion that the cause is profiteering."

He now makes a further declaration on the eve of a general election, and decides to

Hon. W. N. Gillies.]

follow the old Tory method of appointing a Royal Commission to find out where the profiteer is. We know that profiteering is here, and this Bill provides for a Commissioner to be appointed, armed with sufficient power to trace costs, send for persons and papers, and find out exactly where the profiteers are and deal with them in a drastic way. A great of criticism was levelled at this Government by members on the other side during 1915, when we attempted to control prices. Just about the time when the Government was regulating the prices of butter, the "Brisbane Courier" used to come out time and again with headings of this kind. These headings appeared in the "Brisbane Courier." On the 25th November, 1915, there were these headings, reading: "The Dear Food Government," "Price of Butter Increased 1d. per lb." Then on 4th December, 1915, the "Courier" had the following headings: "The Dear Food Government," "Butter up again," "A considerable rise." Those are the headings that appeared in the "Brisbane Courier," the paper that supports the hon. member for Drayton, who is always talking about how the farmer is being robbed. When the Labour Government increased the price of butter based on the evidence before them, the "Courier" complains bitterly. The hon. member for Drayton attempts to convey to this House that there is a great difference between your action, Mr. Speaker, in connection with fixing the price of butter and the action taken by the Commonwealth Government. The hon. member would have us believe that the action of the Commonwealth Government was carried out in a statesmanlike way in the interest of the Australian producer. In order to attempt to deceive the electors of Australia, the Federal member, Mr. Sinclair, in the House of Representatives the other day, said that the butter producers of Queensland were robbed by the Ryan Government of 40s. a cwt.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: That is correct.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: That is not true, as I will prove. The "Brisbane Courier," more concerned about its city supporters—the people that the hon. member for Drayton has no time for, and regards as criminals—used to come out with headings against the Government every time the price of butter was raised, just because the Government wanted to do the fair thing by the farmer. At that time there was no greater critic of the Ryan Government than Mr. Massey Greene. He represents a farming district, and knows something about dairying from actual experience. I am sorry I have not got the speech delivered by him at Tweed Heads about the time that those articles appeared in the "Courier." But he declared that the law of supply and demand was the only way of fixing prices. By a curious coincidence he became price-fixer in the Federal Parliament, but we never hear the member for Drayton now or any member on the Opposition side clamouring about the farmers' treatment by Mr. Greene in the Federal Government. He took their butter and passed it over to the people of Great Britain at from 50s. to 70s. per cwt. lower than they should have got there. Not only that, but when the Commonwealth Government bought their ships they had so much sympathy for the dairy farmer and the primary producer that they bought ships

with no refrigerating machinery, and the consequence was that, while the freight on butter from Australia to Great Britain before the war was 2s. 6d. for a 56-lb. box, during the war it was raised to 5s. 7½d.—over 100 per cent. increase. What has the member for Drayton to say about that?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Didn't all freight rise?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes, and the net profits of the British ship-owners went up during the war from 10 per cent. to 67½ per cent., and the Commonwealth Government made £2,000,000 sterling out of their ships. Australian wheatgrowers got 4s. 9d., while the Canadian got 9s. 2d. There is no talk about that from the "so-called friends of the farmers." Because the Liberal Commonwealth Government did it, it was all right.

Mr. VOWLES: You seized the butter because there was a local shortage—that was the excuse.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: We seized it because it was bought up by the farmers and locked in cold stores by speculators.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: You seized the butter here at 140s. when we could have got 240s. in Melbourne. I will prove it to you.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Is the member for Drayton making this speech, Mr. Speaker, or am I? The Commonwealth Government fixed the price of butter for the producers in Australia, and allowed that butter to be sold in England at from 40s to 70s. less than the actual value. Danish butter was bringing from 60s. to 100s. more than Australian butter for no better quality.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: They treated us very differently from what you have done.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: To show the misleading statements made by Mr. Sinclair a few days ago, I have a table compiled by yourself, Mr. Speaker, when you were in charge of the Agricultural Department, showing the distribution of the profits made by the sale of butter taken over by yourself, and one attached showing the profits distributed to the factories throughout Queensland, irrespective of whether they were exporting factories or not. A factory in my district which is not an exporting factory got the benefit of this deal. The total profits on the sale, less the cost of freight—no charge was made by the department at all—amounted to £32,000, which was distributed to the various factories throughout the State. There is no occasion for me to give the names of these factories and the amounts, but, with the permission of the House, I would like to have it put into "Hansard," if not already there.

The SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that the figures mentioned by the Minister for Agriculture be inserted in "Hansard"?

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Hear, hear! I also want to have this [holding up paper] inserted afterwards.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: I thank the House for this privilege. This is very important, because some of the

[Hon. W. N. Gillies.]

factories did not, in fairness to you, Sir, as Minister for Agriculture, give full publicity; and, if put into "Hansard," it will show the exact position.

DISTRIBUTION OF £32,000 (SURPLUS ON ACCOUNT OF BUTTER ACQUIRED DURING 1915 AND 1916 UNDER "THE CONTROL OF TRADE ACT OF 1914"), ON BASIS OF BUTTER (ALL GRADES) MANUFACTURED DURING THE MONTHS JUNE-OCTOBER, 1916, BOTH INCLUSIVE, BY ALL QUEENSLAND FACTORIES.

Factory.	Production (lb.) on which Distribution based.	Proportion of Payment on account 23rd June, 1917, £23,000.		Proportion of Payment of Balance 26th September, 1917, £9,000.		Total Amount paid.
		£	s. d.	£	s. d.	
Esk Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	Lb. 121,644	267	11 9	104	14 2	572 5 11
Bundaberg Co-operative Dairy Co.	149,118	328	0 5	128	7 1	456 7 6
MacLagan Valley Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	72,879	160	6 4	62	14 8	223 1 0
Pioneer Butter Factory, North Ipswich (A. M. Linton)	11,819	26	0 0	10	3 6	36 3 6
Chinchilla Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	46,787	102	18 5	40	5 6	143 3 11
Warwick Butter and Dairy Co., Ltd.	542,001	1,192	5 4	466	10 9	1,658 16 1
Oakey District Co-operative Butter Co., Ltd.	203,217	447	0 6	174	18 6	621 19 0
Kin Kin Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	157,359	346	3 0	135	9 0	481 12 0
Roma Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	38,082	83	15 5	32	15 7	116 11 0
Queensland Farmers' Co-operative Co., Ltd. (Booval, &c.)	1,440,532	3,188	12 2	1,247	14 4	4,436 6 6
Silverwood Butter Factory Co., Ltd., Gatton	353,698	778	0 11	304	9 1	1,082 10 0
Terrors Creek and Samson Vale Co-operative Co., Ltd., Terrors Creek	41,378	91	0 5	35	12 4	126 12 9
*Premier Butter Factory Co., Ltd., South Brisbane	104,540	229	19 3	89	19 8	319 18 11
Farmers and Producers' Co-operative, Ltd., Rockhampton	45,329	99	14 3	39	0 4	138 14 7
Caboolture Co-operative Co., Ltd.	985,976	2,168	18 0	848	14 0	3,017 12 0
Maleny Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	206,059	631	5 1	254	16 9	906 1 10
Marburg Butter Factory (A. L. Frederick)	137,798	302	2 5	118	12 3	421 14 8
Killarney Dairy Co., Ltd.	34,376	75	12 4	29	11 9	105 4 1
Stanley River Co-operative Co., Ltd., Woodford	123,573	271	16 7	106	7 4	378 3 11
Southern Queensland Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd., Kingston	793,016	1,744	8 9	682	12 1	2,427 0 10
Nanango Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	129,398	284	12 10	111	7 8	396 9 6
Logan and Albert Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd., Beaudesert	386,180	849	10 0	332	8 3	1,181 18 3
Maryborough Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	934,557	2,055	15 10	804	8 10	2,860 4 8
Rockhampton District Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	102,790	226	2 3	88	9 7	314 11 10
Atherton Tableland Co-operative Butter and Bacon Co., Ltd.	374,016	822	14 10	321	18 10	1,144 13 8
Gayndah Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	110,996	244	3 3	95	10 10	339 14 1
Crow's Nest Butter Co., Ltd.	144,989	318	18 9	124	16 0	443 14 9
Pommer Bros., Ipswich	33,205	73	0 10	28	11 8	101 12 6
Port Curtis Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	158,951	349	13 1	136	16 5	486 9 6
Downs Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd.	965,996	2,124	19 0	831	10 1	2,956 9 1
Wide Bay Co-operative Dairy Co., Gympie	552,314	1,214	19 1	475	8 4	1,690 7 5
Goombungee Co-operative Dairy Co.	173,880	382	9 10	149	13 5	532 3 3
South Burnett Co-operative Dairy Co., Ltd., Murgon	501,360	1,102	17 4	431	11 2	1,534 8 6
W. Siemon and Sons, Ltd., Walloon	178,924	393	11 9	154	0 3	547 12 0
	10,455,737	£23,000	0 0	£9,000	0 0	£32,000 0 0

* Paid to Foggitt, Jones, and Co., Ltd., in pursuance of authority dated 16th November, 1916, given by Premier Butter Factory, Co. Ltd.

Hon. W. H. BARNES: But what did the Commonwealth Government do?

Mr. BEBBINGTON also interjected.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The hon. member for Drayton should endeavour to assist his colleague in the Federal House, Mr. Mackay, who has endeavoured, without success, for a long time to get the exact facts from the Commonwealth Government as to charges and profits on butter. If he will get those figures, we will endeavour to put them into "Hansard" also.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: We have the money; that is the hard fact.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The Commonwealth Government have not

satisfied Mr. Mackay with regard to charges made by them in handling the butter. I have just pointed out that, with the enormous profit made out of ships by the Commonwealth Government—two million sterling—they did not show any sympathy for the dairy farmer. They did not endeavour to purchase ships with refrigerating space, but left them to the tender mercies of the shipping combine.

Mr. MORGAN: What did you do for the farmers up North during the railway strike with regard to their fruit?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Referring again to the early criticism of our honest attempt to regulate prices in 1915, I have a pamphlet here, published by the

Hon. W. N. Gillies.]

Free Trade and Land Values League of Victoria. I believe that they are disciples of Henry George, and are quite honest in their ideas with regard to this matter. They published an extract from their work, "The Common People of Ancient Rome," wherein they say, speaking of Diocletian, the Roman Emperor—

"When (by his various legal burdens) he had brought on a state of exceeding high prices by his different acts of injustice, he tried to fix, by law, the prices of articles offered for sale: thereupon for the various trifles much blood was shed, and out of fear nothing was offered for sale, and scarcity grew much worse until, after the death of many persons, the law was repealed from mere necessity.

"The Emperor Julian, sixty years after Diocletian, fixed the price of wheat for the people of Antioch, by an edict. The holders of grain hoarded their stock. The Emperor brought supplies of it into the city, from Egypt and elsewhere, and sold it at the legal price. It was bought up by speculators, and in the end Julian, like Diocletian, had to acknowledge his inability to cope with an economic law."

That was their argument in favour of profiteering. Nearly a thousand years later—as quoted by Mr. Fihelly, the present Minister for Railways, in this House—one of the Plantagenet kings, Henry III., enacted—

"Especially be it commanded that no forestaller be suffered to dwell in any town."

Here we have a good definition of a profiteer. It goes on—

"It defines 'a forestaller' as a man who, seeking his own evil gain, goes to meet corn, fish, herrings, or other articles for sale as they are being brought by land or water, carries them off, and contrives that they shall be sold at a dearer rate.

"Such a man the Statute declares is the public enemy of the whole community and country. He that is convict thereof the first time shall lose the things so bought; the second time he shall have judgment of the pillory; the third time he shall be imprisoned and make fine. And this judgment shall be given upon all manner of forestallers; likewise upon those who have given them counsel, help, or favour."

The hon. member for Toowong would come under the category of having given advice, counsel, or help in favour of "the forestaller."

Many honest attempts have been made to fix prices. But, as a rule, price-fixing has been carried out, not in the interests of the people—the producers or consumers—but the speculators themselves, who, in fixing prices, are the people who squeal against any attempt by the Government to regulate their profits. The single-taxers were quite honest in their belief that price-fixing was wrong—that the only way of solving the problems was to have free trade. Henry George had not been able to see the great growth of trusts and combines. He was unable, in his time, to recognise the great strides made by trusts and combines during the last twenty-five years. If he were alive to-day he would not pin his faith to single-tax or free

[Hon. W. N. Gillies.

trade. Protection in America—his country—has had the effect of bringing a large population there, which is a desirable thing. It would be much better for Australia to bring the people here to use the things we produce than to ship the raw products away and bring back the finished article at fancy prices. While America has been doing that, she has been building up trusts and combines and creating millionaires. Socrates said, "Man would not be wholly free until all the work was done by machinery." Socrates did not recognise that machinery was going to be greedily controlled by a small section of the people to the detriment of the worker. It would be a good thing if all the laborious work were done by machinery so long as it was done in the interests of the people; but if it put the worker out of employment, it is not going to be good for the community. Those philosophers, though wise in their generation, did not realise the great growth that has taken place in trusts and combines during the last quarter of a century, and machinery, science, and invention were being controlled by the few to the injury of the many.

I want to refer to the necessity for this Bill, because members of the Opposition are not quite satisfied that there is a necessity for it. They want to know where the profiteer was, and also said it was impossible to deal with him. To show that the profiteer is abroad, I might be permitted to get into "Hansard" a few extracts—cables that I have been collecting since the termination of the war to show that many of us believed before the war was over, and whilst it was in progress, that this was the last of wars, and was going to solve most of our great problems. A.

[9.30 p.m.] showing that problems have only just commenced since the war is over, I want to quote a few cablegrams I have collected from the daily papers since the signing of the armistice. They showed that the great food problem is the problem which concerns the people of all countries, the problem of which a statesman and journalists are attempting to find a solution. For instance, some of these cablegrams are as follows:—

"WORLD FOOD SHORTAGE.

"WORKERS MUST SAVE HUMANITY.

"Paris, August 7.

"Mr. H. C. Hoover (the Allied Food Controller) states that the world is faced with the gravest danger of a food shortage, and the workers must save humanity. Eight hours is the maximum time in which manual workers can labour efficiently, but they must really work full time. It is impossible, he says, for America to save Europe from a coal famine. America can produce 600,000,000 tons of coal annually, but cannot transport more than 1,000,000 tons of all merchandise monthly, whereas 20,000,000 tons of fuel alone are required each month to save Europe."

"HIGH PRICE OF SUGAR.

"SCARCITY IN AMERICA.

"Washington, Saturday.

"The Senate has unanimously passed a resolution providing for an investigation into the scarcity and high price of sugar. Senator New said he had been warned that the price would soon be 20 cents (10d.) per lb."

"PROFITEERS BEWARE.**"JAP. EXPLOITER MURDERED.****"(United), London, Mon.**

The 'Daily Express's' Tokio correspondent reports that an extraordinary murder is exciting Japan. M. Yamada, an official in the Food Department, clubbed a rich rice importer, and threw his body into the river. When arrested, Yamada pleaded that he had high moral grounds for the crime, declaring that he slew his victim because his wickedness unfitted him to live. He was a profiteer and inciter to food riots. Yamada engaged leading counsel, who pleaded another unwritten law.

"It appears that the victim brought £5,000 to Yamada's house, hoping to obtain a concession by bribery."

"The unwritten law has taken on a new form in Japan, if the story about Yamada, a food official of Nippon, is correct. The Yamada story is that a Jap. profiteer came along to the food official's house with £5,000 in his pocket, this sum to be applied to bribe Yamada to allow the profiteer certain concessions. Yamada promptly slew the tempter, on the general grounds that the wickedness of such a creature unfitted him to live. And now a Jap. jury is being asked to declare Yamada guiltless of murder on the principle that his action was morally justifiable. Things surely will hum in Jappy land, especially in the places where the profiteers foregather, if the jury starts a new 'unwritten law' precedent in this direction."

Mr. G. P. BARNES: What has that got to do with Australia?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: It has got a good deal to do with it, because I say this is a world problem. The Opposition say that we should not attempt to deal with this problem, and I am showing that other parts of the world are finding it necessary to deal with it.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: We do not deny it.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Hon. members do deny it. Here are some more of these messages—

"FOOD PRICES IN EUROPE.**"BRITISH MINISTER CONCERNED.****"London, Friday.**

"The Food Minister is acutely concerned about prices, though he is not apprehensive regarding supplies. He suggests that a Council of European Allies should replace the expiring Supreme Economic Council. Europe, he says, cannot expect America any longer to control home prices for the benefit of European consumers. Mr. Roberts says that no price can be considered safe, and the prospects for 1920 are not bright."

"BRITISH STRIKE TROUBLES.

"Rioting and looting continued at Liverpool until 3 o'clock this morning. Soldiers several times charged the mob responsible for looting the shops with bayonets, and, after firing a volley into the air, fired on the crowd, wounding a rioter, who clung to a bayonet, and who died later. A warship and two destroyers have arrived in the Mersey to protect the docks. At a mass meeting of Liverpool trade unionists, it was urged that all workers in the district should strike in sympathy with the

police. Members of the branch of the Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen have entered upon a sympathetic strike, compelling the abandonment of the special bank holiday race trains. Military reinforcements have now arrived in the city, including machine gunners and cavalrymen."

"DEALING WITH PROFITEERS.**"DRASTIC BILL IN BRITAIN.****"London 6th August.**

"The Government is introducing in the House of Commons a drastic Bill, under which persons found guilty of profiteering may be proceeded against and be made liable to a term of imprisonment not exceeding six months.

"The Bill will establish tribunals to deal with profiteering.

"The introduction of the Government's Bill came as a bombshell to the Profiteering Committee, which is now considering a discontinuance of their investigations, as the Government has decided the matter."

"FOOD CONTROLLER'S EVIDENCE.**"London, 5th August.**

"The Food Controller (Mr. G. H. Roberts), giving evidence before the Select Committee on profiteering, said that practically all foods were controlled, and that 94 per cent. was subject to maximum prices. Nothing of importance had been omitted, except some green vegetables and some fruits."

"ANTI-PROFITEERING BILL.**"CARRIED IN COMMONS.****"251 TO 8.****"(Reuter) London, Tuesday.**

"Sir Auckland Geddes emphasised the baneful effects of profiteering, which included the creation of social unrest, which was materially contributing to the disturbance and disorganisation of industrial life. Workers were discouraged from producing freely because they felt they were lining the pockets of employers. He instanced the profiteering under which boots, purchasable wholesale at from 15s. to 25s., were retailed at from 50s. to 70s. a pair, also tenders were made for repairing cottages amounting to £3,500, whereas £2,500 provide an adequate profit."

According to a later cablegram, the Minister for Labour, Sir R. S. Horne, replying in the House of Commons, said—

"The Bill gave the Board of Trade power to make investigations, without which the combines could not be broken or prices regulated."

That is a very important cablegram, because it shows the wisdom of my colleague in taking power to deal with combines.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: What is the use of taking power without using it?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Hon. members will find that when the Bill becomes law the Minister for Public Works will use it in an effective way, in the interests of the producer and the consumer. Mr. Horne went on to say—

"The Bill would also render great service by making people understand that in many cases the high prices were due to shortage of the output of commodities; and increased production afforded the best hope of decreasing the

Hon. W. N. Gillies.]

cost of living. The closure was applied by 251 votes to 8, and the Bill referred to the Committee of the Whole House."

The limitations of the English Act were referred to in a telegram published on 24th September, 1919—

"London, Tuesday.

"The anti-profiteer measures are resulting in a quick reduction of shopkeepers' prices, especially in cheaper clothing, sugar, and boots. The Government's Profiteering Act Department is classifying complaints of many concerns, such as laundrying, furniture removals, and building repairs, which the tribunals refuse to touch, because the Act only refers to 'articles in common use.'"

That, again, shows the wisdom of my colleague in providing in the Bill that it shall apply to all services. The Bill can apply to tramcar services, to freights or fares, to any services at all. Even the charges at a picture show can be brought under this Bill, showing that my colleague has profited by the experience of older countries as a result of the limitation of their measures. Other telegrams I have are as follows:—

"TO CHECK PROFITEERING.

"London, September 22.

"Nine hundred local profiteering committees, with the purpose of supervising the prices charged by traders for commodities, have already been formed in the country, including all the large centres of population."

"400 PER CENT. PROFIT.

"BRITISH WOOL INDUSTRY.

"London, September 25.

"The investigations made by the Board of Trade have revealed the fact that excessive profits are made in certain branches of the wool industry, in some cases amounting to 400 per cent. The Board has ordered the Profiteering Department to take action in the matter."

Mr. ELPHINSTONE: Take it as read.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: I am going to get them into "Hansard," and they are sufficient reply to the Opposition who say that Queensland is attempting to do something that is quite unnecessary. Other telegrams are as follows:—

"COST OF LIVING.

"MINERS' STRONG PROTEST.

"London, Saturday.—Many branches of the National Union of Railwaymen have forwarded resolutions to the executive appealing for an effort to secure reduction in the cost of living, or to demand a further increase in wages of £1 weekly. The executive has decided to approach the Trades Union Congress of the Labour party on the matter."

"HIGH PRICES.

"GRAVE SITUATION IN ITALY.

"London, July 14.

"In the House of Commons to-day, Mr. Bonar Law said that the Government would appoint a select committee to inquire into high prices."

"Rome, July 14.

"A grave situation has arisen in following the popular outburst against prices. There is paralysis in some trades, manufacturers declaring that it is impossible to make goods at reduced prices, whilst wages are unchanged. The socialists refuse to agree to a reduction in wages.

[Hon. W. N. Gillies.

The local authorities are endeavouring to find a solution."

"PROFITEERING.

"1,350 CONVICTIONS.

"London, Friday.—Mr. McCurdy, M.P., in a speech in London, said that 1,600 profiteering tribunals were already working. Since the Profiteering Act had been passed the Food Ministry had instituted 1,350 prosecutions, and had obtained 1,350 convictions. The fines totalled £70,000."

Just think of that for a moment. Fines totalling £70,000, and the Commonwealth doing nothing! I want now to read a cablegram concerning France and Italy—

"DEALING WITH PROFITEERS.

"FRENCH AND ITALIAN METHODS.

"In France, M. Basly and M. Cadot, members for Pas de Calais in the Chamber of Deputies, have brought forward a Bill to make speculation in the necessities of life and the securing of monopolies an offence punishable with death (writes a Melbourne Press correspondent from London). But this measure is not likely to meet with general support. On the other hand, it is felt that the Government proposals are inadequate. In a Bill which the Government is bringing before Parliament it is proposed to make speculators in foods, drinks, fuel, fats, clothes, boots, and shoes liable to a fine up to £4,000 and imprisonment up to three years. Persons whose business has not previously included dealings in such goods are to be liable on conviction of profiteering to five years' imprisonment and a fine up to £8,000. Traders must exhibit price lists in their shops. Goods that are held back at docks and railway stations by wholesalers with the object of creating an artificial scarcity can be seized by the Government and sold by auction."

"NO ACTION.

"PROFITEERING IN BRITAIN.

"Government stands for it.

"('Times') London, Sunday.

"The high prices of food and the cost of necessities are causing great anxiety in France and England. M. Clemenceau is taking action similar to that taken in Italy for the suppression of profiteers. The British Government has not yet moved, despite the Labour protests and newspaper warnings. Members of the House of Commons are generally apprehensive over the abnormal prices which we believed to be due to the shortage of supplies. Labour leaders threaten further industrial unrest again, forcing up wages unless the Government promptly deals with the rampant profiteering."

"The grabbing mania is already apparent in connection with the peace rejoicings. West End shopkeepers are asking from £1 to £300 for the use of small windows for sightseeing."

There are many more that I could quote, but these will indicate what is moving in other parts of the world, and it is a warning to the rulers of all countries that the problem must be faced. I regret that my time has expired, as I desired to furnish figures showing huge profits made out of the people during the war.

The SPEAKER: The Minister has exceeded the time allowed him under the Standing Orders.

Mr. BEBBINGTON (*Drayton*): I would like to say a few words on this Bill. First

of all, I should like to say that it should not be a party matter, because when this Government came into office they had handed to them a power equal to what they are asking for to-day. I hate the profiteer, especially in war time, and, as I have said before, if I had my way I would hang him straightaway in war time. But I hate the hypocrite just as badly, and is it not about time that the party opposite came down to something real; is it not time that they dropped their hypocrisy and put something real before the people and the workers of this State; is it not time that they dropped those dreams of abolishing private ownership and that kind of thing, in which they think they are going to get food and clothes, and pleasure and everything else, heaped upon them for nothing? I say it is time. I have here in my hand a copy of the very power handed to them when they took the reins of the Government, for the Denham Government with the reins of Government handed to them, a power not only to control trusts and combines, but a power also to seize everything that those trusts and combines owned. If that were not sufficient, what did they want? It is still in existence. The Minister admits that the Act has not been proclaimed out of existence—that it is still the law of the land. Section 12 says—

“If the Chief Secretary has, at any time, reason to suspect that any person has been guilty of any offence against this Act, or that any goods are kept stored or had in possession under such circumstances that an offence against this Act is being committed, he may, by an order, authorise any State officer to seize, take possession of, carry away, and detain any such goods, and for such purpose with any necessary assistance to enter any place or premises whatsoever and search for any such goods, and to use such force as may be necessary.”

If that is not sufficient power to hand to any Government, I do not know what is. Clause 2 says—

“This Act shall come into operation on a day to be named by the Governor in Council by proclamation—”

The Denham Government proclaimed that Act before they went out of office, and handed to this Government all the power they needed to deal with these things. Then that same section goes on to say—

“and shall remain in force during such period or extended period as the Governor in Council, by proclamation published in the ‘Gazette’ from time to time, declares.”

The Government practically say that every trader is a profiteer. Why did the Government have that power for four and a-half years and never use it? Why do they stand up in this House and say this condition of things exist and never use the power they have? As the Minister has contrived to get some matter into “Hansard,” I am going to ask the House for permission to put this Act into “Hansard,” to show the people of Queensland the power that was handed to this Government by the Denham Government when they left office.

The SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that the Act of Parliament referred to by the hon. member for Drayton be included in his speech in “Hansard”?

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: No, no!

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I presume I have the permission of the House.

The SPEAKER: The permission is not granted.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I would divide the House, except that it would take up too much of my time. It shows that they are ashamed to allow the people to see the power that was handed to them by the Denham Government. (Uproar.)

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member must remember that if only one member objects to printing in “Hansard” a long Act like that, it cannot be allowed.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I quite agree that you have carried out your part of the bargain, Mr. Speaker; but I say that members of the Opposition agreed that that matter should be placed in “Hansard” so that the people should see the power which the Denham Government handed to this Government to deal with trusts and combines which they have had for four and a-half years and have never used. I think it is about time we “faced the music,” doing away with the hypocrisy which we have had in connection with this Bill. I say there is absolutely no reason whatever for it. The Minister says he believes these trusts and combines exist; he believes that the profiteers he spoke of exist. We should expect him, when this Bill is passed, to produce the evidence. We will look in vain. If he has not done anything in four and a-half years with the power which he has had, what is he going to do with the power which this Bill confers?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: We have had no power at all.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Does the hon. member think the public are school children when he says they have had no power? Why did Government members refuse to allow that Act to go into “Hansard” so that the people should see what power the Government had?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS: What about the War Precautions Act?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: They are ashamed to let the people see what power was handed down to them. That Act includes all goods and chattels. Not only does the Act exist, but I will show how the Government have used it by quoting portion of a speech by the hon. member for Cunningham in “Hansard,” vol. cxxiii., page 71. (Laughter.) In 1915 we were suffering from a drought, something similar to that from which we are suffering now, and very little wheat was grown. A certain amount of wheat had to be brought from the Argentine. Some of us must remember that it was very inferior wheat. The other night in Brisbane the late Premier complained that the New South Wales people should have had more than 5s. per bushel for their wheat. This Government, in a time of unparalleled drought in 1915, fixed the price of local wheat at 3s. 6d. a bushel, and the price of imported second grade wheat at 8s. 6d. a bushel.

Hon. J. G. APPEL: Shame!

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Under the Act which was handed down to them, which they said gave them no power to deal with the profiteer, they fixed the price of locally-grown flour at £9 10s. per ton for our drought-stricken farmers, and the price of second-class Argentine wheat, grown partly by coloured labour, at £21 per ton.

Hon. J. G. APPEL: Save us from our friends!

Mr. Bebbington.]

Mr. BEBBINGTON: That shows the sympathy they had, and how they used the power which they deny existed. At that time the farmers had sold their wheat to the Warwick Milling Company, a mill owned by farmers. There were proprietary mills in that town and in this city. The Government did not choose to interfere with the proprietary mills. I may say the Hon. J. M. Hunter was a very much sharper man in business than the then Premier was. He went to the telephone; he did not leave any records behind him. He ordered this company to send down their wheat, and they refused to do it. The Premier was a new chum in business, and when Mr. Hunter said they would not supply it he said, "I will send them a telegram." He forgot that the telegram could be produced. This is what the telegram said—

"On the understanding your company will send down to Government all wheat required, and 6,000 bags will be sent at once, compulsory acquisition will not be resorted to at present."

Hon. J. G. APPEL: The farmers' friends!

Mr. BEBBINGTON: A moment ago they declared they had not the power. Here the Premier uses that power to seize the wheat held by a co-operative company—by the growers of the wheat.

Mr. WHITFORD: Barnes and Company.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: He did not interfere with Barnes and Company, neither did he interfere with the Brisbane Milling Company. As usual, he seized upon the farmer. The Premier did not deny he sent that telegram. He said at that time, "Was it not a very necessary wire?"

Mr. FOLEY: He was honest.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Of course, he was honest, and he was carrying out the Act which I hold in my hand. The Premier could deal with companies and seize anything he could lay his hands on.

Mr. GRAYSON: He was prompted to send that wire by Mr. Hunter, one of the most cunning men who has ever sat in the House.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: To show hon. members that this was a farmers' company, I will quote the words then used by the hon. member for Cunningham—

"The Premier: Was it not a very necessary one?"

"Mr. GRAYSON: I do not think so. The point I wish to emphasise is this—the Warwick Farmers' Milling Company is owned by small farmers in the southern end of the Downs. The great bulk of the shareholders are ten and twenty shareholders, and the first mill that the Government, notwithstanding all their pretence that they are in favour of co-operation, pounce upon and threaten to compulsorily seize their wheat was a mill controlled and run by the farmers of Queensland."

Mr. SMITH (*Mackay*): I rise to a point of order. I claim that the hon. member for Drayton is dealing with administrative acts under a different Act altogether from the one he is quoting, and is not discussing the principles of the Bill before the House.

The SPEAKER: A good deal of latitude has been allowed in this debate, necessarily because it is very unique legislation dealing with a very complex and difficult matter. Having allowed latitude in the earlier part

[*Mr. Bebbington.*

of the debate, I must be consistent and allow the hon. member to continue.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: A more contemptible attitude I never saw. (Laughter.) Anything at all to stop discussion on their actions which they are ashamed of. I will deal with this matter as shortly as I can. I have a very kind regard for the Minister, who, unfortunately, has been bogged into this. The Government again used the same Act, although they denied that the power was in existence, to seize butter at £60 a ton under its value. I will quote from "Hansard" again—

"The day that butter was seized I met a Brisbane merchant, who told me that his firm was offered from 190s. to 200s. per cwt. for butter in Melbourne, and the Government took that butter over at 140s. per cwt.—a difference of 60s. per cwt., or £60 per ton!"

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: Who said that?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: The man whom I can rely on to speak the truth, and that is myself. (Loud laughter.) I am quoting that because I know that it is correct—

"A difference of 60s. per cwt., or £60 per ton. Was that a fair thing to do?"

I may say that on the very morning that that happened I met J. C. Hutton and Co.'s representative and two or three other representatives of firms.

Mr. WHITFORD: Middlemen?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: They were men who were acting as honourable agents for the co-operative companies of Queensland. The commission is fixed, and people know what they are paying, and, more than that, their dealings with the co-operative companies were much more satisfactory than the Government's dealing with them. The firms I have quoted certainly charged the commission they were entitled to, but they did not take anything by force from the farmers or co-operative companies. The Government acted as forced agents. What did they do? When butter was worth 200s. per cwt., free on board, and it was costing the farmer 3s. 6d. per lb. to produce it, instead of letting the farmers put it on board at 200s. per cwt., they stopped the export. Can you produce it at that now?

Mr. W. COOPER: Yes.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I say that you cannot, and you are not a farmer if you say that. When we could have got 200s. per cwt. free on board here, the Government stopped the export to Melbourne, seized the lot, and handed to the people of Brisbane as much as they wanted. The Minister of that day said, "Shout the glad tidings, sound the glad news, that I am the only man who has got butter to sell." (Laughter and uproar.) I have a good deal of sympathy for the Minister who was placed in this position.

The SPEAKER: Judging from the matter which the hon. member is quoting, the Minister must have been very sure of his ground. (Laughter.)

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Then, again, we had orders for tinned butter from the East. We had worked up a very big trade there, which was necessary to pay our farmers, and to keep them on the land, and to pay the men working in our factories their wages. We had always had 170s. or 180s. for the butter which we sent away. The present Government stepped in, and made us sell it to the people

of Brisbane for 120s. Assisted by the Commonwealth, they allowed New Zealand butter to come in free of duty. Of course, it was going out again. They allowed it to come in under bond, and it filled the orders which our factories should have supplied. The New Zealand farmers got 170s. per cwt. for their butter, while we farmers had to take 123s. so as to provide the people of Brisbane with a cheap butter. It is exactly the same to-day. In 1915, we were suffering from a drought like we are now, and yet in Brisbane to-day you see all the evidence of wealth. I am not grudging the working classes anything.

Mr. FOLEY: Judge not, that ye be not judged.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I will tell the hon. member something about a judge. I will quote something to show the intentions of this Bill. I am given to understand that the intention in regard to this Bill is, first of all, to pull down the price of foodstuffs. Who is going to pay for it—who is going to work for nothing and be sweated to pull prices down? You cannot produce foodstuffs any cheaper than they are being produced to-day.

Mr. W. COOPER: We do not say you can.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I understand that the Arbitration Court will then pull down the rate of wages, and bring about the same conditions which existed before the war. I am told on very good authority that that is the object which the present Government have in view in introducing this Bill. I will be no party to that. I say that low wages are no good to anybody. Low wages mean poverty, bad living, and slums. I will be no party to pull down the price of produce to-day so that the Arbitration Court can pull down the price of living. Let me quote Judge McCawley. Hon. members opposite cannot deny that he is one of their greatest supporters.

The SPEAKER: Order! Order!

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I will quote his exact words. There cannot be any harm in that. He said—

“Extraordinary high prices are obtainable for our exportable primary products, every increase of which adds to the burdens of the wage-earners in the city.”

I presume, if he gets the opportunity, he is going to cut those prices down. Who is going to be sweated under those conditions?

Mr. FOLEY: You will have to do with less profits.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Does not the hon. member know that the farmers to-day are working for no profits at all; that they are not getting 1s. a week; that it takes more than their returns to feed their cattle? And the hon. member says we should be satisfied with less profits. Hon. members point out their interest in the workers. How can they have an interest in the workers if they are planning a scheme to pull down the price of foodstuffs in order that the court can pull down wages? The Minister, in his speech, mentioned particularly condensed milk. He did not think the condensed milk companies formed a trust or combine, but the fact that he mentioned the matter shows that those things are running through the mind of the Government. I will speak of one condensed milk company—Wyreema; and I say they have paid their producers a splendid price for their milk. They have paid them a good deal more than we can pay for butter and cheese. As business men,

they have brought produce up from the South and have given it to the farmers at cost price. They have done everything they can to save the herds of the State, which they, as a company, are depending on for business, and now we have the Minister putting that company down as one of the monopolies that should be dealt with. I am sorry that the hon. member for Bowen is not here. Some time ago the hon. member complained that the merchants in Bowen were selling sugar at ½d. per lb. above the price.

Mr. KIRWAN: He did not say Bowen. Wrong again.

A GOVERNMENT MEMBER: Proserpine.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: At Proserpine, or some place. I am going to quote an extract from the Press, which says this—

“The joke of the list is that, while Mr. Collins, member for Bowen, recently expressed some resentment at the fact that grocers in Bowen were alleged to be charging 4½d. per lb. for sugar, the price at the Government store on the works is 6d. per lb.”

Mr. SMITH: What are you quoting from?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: It appears in both the “Courier” and “Daily Mail,” and I presume they are a great deal more reliable than the papers the hon. member would like to quote. What is it that constitutes a trust or profiteer? Is a trader to be judged on the interest that he can pay on his capital: or is he to be judged on the amount of profit that he makes on his turnover? If you are going to judge a man to be a profiteer because he can pay 15 per cent. or 16 per cent. on the amount of money invested, you will do an injustice to the good business men. Possibly, the man who could not pay any interest at all would be a greater profiteer than the man who paid 15 per cent. or 16 per cent. Supposing a person invests £100 in trade, and one trader turns over his money once in the year and another trader turns it over three times. The trader who is a good business man and turns his money over three times in the year would, perhaps, make less profit on each article than the other trader who only turned his money over once, and still he might make a larger percentage on the capital invested. Hon. members on the other side have shown no business capacity whatever to deal with these matters. They have not even quoted an Australian case of profiteering. They have had four and a-half years of office and were in possession of all the requisite powers to prevent profiteering. If you are going to judge a man on the amount of interest he makes on his capital, then you are going to penalise industry. I believe that the cost of distribution is too high. You have only to take the State industries. Take the State butchers' shops. It costs more to distribute the meat over the counter—no delivery in the city or in the country—it costs more to deliver meat over the counter than it takes to raise the beast, dress him, and everything else, and bring him down to Brisbane and put him into the shop.

Mr. WELLINGTON: You are a liar.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: The hon. member does not know any better, so I will pass him over.

Mr. WELLINGTON: You are a liar.

Mr. MORGAN: I rise to a point of order. Is the hon. member in order in calling the hon. member for Drayton a liar?

Mr. Morgan.]

The SPEAKER: The hon. member is not in order, and I call upon the hon. member for Charters Towers to withdraw.

Mr. WELLINGTON: On account of parliamentary practice, I withdraw.

The SPEAKER: The hon. member must withdraw without any qualification whatever. Does the hon. member withdraw?

Mr. WELLINGTON: I withdraw.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I am quoting the price list issued by the department. The public have to pay according to those prices, and I see they are getting the meat from the meatworks at 2d. per lb. and they sell it up to 8d. per lb. If we take it at an average of 6d. per lb., there is over 100 per cent. Does anyone say that it costs 100 per cent. to hand the meat over the counter? There is something sadly wrong about it. We have only to go to the State refreshment-rooms as well. We find that bottled lager beer costs under 1s. a bottle.

The Government are the biggest profiteers. They make six or eight glasses out of every bottle of lager at their refreshment-rooms. They are tiny glasses that they give to the public, and they make 500 per cent. out of it. Where is the profiteering now? How many glasses do they get out of a bottle of spirit at the Government refreshment-rooms? They make from 500 to 900 per cent. They even make a profit out of the buns, an article of food. I do not say that it is all profit, but there is a difference of 200 per cent. between the selling and buying price. The costs of distribution are too high altogether. We ought to find some way of distributing our articles of food cheaper than we are doing at the present time. Unfortunately, the Government have made no effort whatever to encourage production or increase production so that the cost of living can be kept down. I am not going to say that increased production will make food cheaper. So far as farm and dairy produce to-day are concerned, I say that the people of Australia are living on the finest, cheapest, and purest foodstuffs in the world.

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

Mr. MORGAN (*Murilla*): I beg to move the adjournment of the debate.

Question put and passed.

The resumption of the debate was made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

SUCCESSION ACT OF 1906 DECLARATORY BILL.

RETURNED FROM COUNCIL.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Legislative Council returning this Bill without amendment.

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT SAVINGS BANK ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

MESSAGE FROM COUNCIL.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a message from the Legislative Council returning this Bill with amendments, in which they invited the concurrence of the Assembly.

On the motion of the TREASURER, the message of the Council was ordered to be taken into consideration to-morrow.

The House adjourned at twenty-five minutes past 10 o'clock p.m.

[*Hon. W. Larnon.*]