

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 8 DECEMBER 1920

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

WEDNESDAY, 8 DECEMBER, 1920.

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

PAPER.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. J. A. Fihelly, *Paddington*) laid upon the table of the House the Report of the Commissioner, together with Statements of Accounts, Balance-sheets, etc., of the respective State Enterprises, for the year ended 30th June, 1920.

The report was ordered to be printed.

QUESTIONS.

B.I.S.N. CO.'S STEAMER SERVICE VIA TORRES STRAIT—STEAMER SERVICE WITH CENTRAL AND NORTHERN PORTS.

Mr. SMITH (*Mackay*), in the absence of Mr. Forde, asked the Premier—

"1. Is the Torres Strait steamer service, formerly carried out by the British India Company under contract with the Queensland Government, still operative?"

"2. Will he consider the question of further subsidising shipping for the Central and Northern ports, with a view to arriving at a new and more favourable agreement with the British India Company, thus ensuring a better service for the Central and Northern ports?"

"3. Will he give early consideration to the question of establishing a State line of steamers for Queensland, with a regular service between Rockhampton and Northern ports?"

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

"1 to 3. Yes. At the present time there is a temporary service in operation, and this will be continued until the 30th June, 1921, when the question of reviving or amending the original contract will be considered."

ADVANCES BY GOVERNMENT SAVINGS BANK TO NATURALISED GERMANS.

Mr. KING (*Zogan*) asked the Treasurer—

"1. Did the Labour Government, at any time during the war, direct the Commissioner of the Government Savings Bank not to grant advances to naturalised subjects of German origin?"

"2. If so, did the Government, just prior to the last general elections, direct the Commissioner of the Government Savings Bank to remove that restriction?"

"3. Were any letters sent out from the Treasury Department to any Labour members of the last Parliament notifying them that such restriction had been removed?"

"4. Did the Labour Government, at any time during the war, direct the officer in charge of the Workers' Dwellings Department not to let contracts to any naturalised person of German origin?"

The TREASURER replied—

"1. No; but the War Precautions Act had that effect.

"2. See answer to No. 1.

"3. Yes. The Commissioner of the Queensland Government Savings Bank advised that he proposed to make advances to enemy subjects or naturalised persons of enemy origin, subject to the approval of Cabinet to such action, and provided satisfactory reports were obtained by him from the police as regards the applicants' loyalty and character generally, and on condition that the applicants were not liable to be deported or otherwise dealt with by the Commonwealth Government. The Cabinet approved of the Commissioner's proposal, and certain members of Parliament were advised of the Commissioner's intended action.

"4. In February, 1916, prior to the appointment of the Commissioner of the bank, it was decided that no contracts were to be let to enemy subjects by the Workers' Dwellings Board."

SUPPLY.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE—SECOND ALLOTTED DAY.

(*Mr. Smith, Mackay, in the chair.*)

COMMISSIONER OF PRICES.

Item—Commissioner of Prices, £4,185, which Mr. Morgan moved be reduced by £1.

Question stated—That £4,184 only be granted.

The PREMIER said that, in giving detailed information regarding the Chief Secretary's office yesterday, he inadvertently stated that the cost, for the financial year 1919-1920, of the Acting Premier's attendance at the Premier's conference was £180. The "Courier" that morning stressed the fact that the Acting Premier was only away nine days, and thus his expenses averaged £20 per day. The actual facts were, that the Acting Premier was away sixteen days, and the cost of his visit, including that of two officers, was £90 10s. 7d. He (Mr. Theodore) made the mistake of giving the total amount of the Acting Premier's expenses during his term as Acting Premier in 1919-1920, including visits to Townsville and to other centres, and including accompanying officers' expenses.

Mr. BEBBINGTON (*Drayton*): He had much pleasure in supporting the amendment for the reduction of the vote by £1. He was not going to say that the exact cost of the inquiry with regard to the production of butter was not correct just at the present time, but it was not the average cost by a long way. Dairymen were not given that consideration with regard to the hours of labour which they ought to have. He would just show one side of the picture. If they left the city and walked into the country they would find that dairymen rose at 5 o'clock in the morning and came in for their breakfast at 8 o'clock. A dairyman did more work between 5 o'clock and 8 o'clock in the morning than many city people had to do all day. After breakfast the dairyman started another day's work, finishing about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, when he came in for his tea. After tea he had to look after his cows while people in the city were going to picture shows and enjoying themselves. The dairyman's wife worked the same hours. On the other side of the picture, they saw in the towns and the cities, all the evidences of wealth,

elaborate suburban homes, lovely residences, motor cars, people coming from the theatres, and going to work in the morning in comfort. Yet, the Premier and the present Government were ready to compel the people of the country to work long hours in order to give those rich people cheap food.

The PREMIER: What rich people are you talking about?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: The people of Brisbane and everywhere else. Did the Premier want any other evidences of richness than to go to the outskirts of the city and see lovely residences, or, in the city to see the people issuing from the theatres to the motor cars waiting for them? The Premier could choose his course deliberately. He had made his choice, and like anyone else he had to pay the price. The price was that houses were being removed from country districts into the cities. Dairymen were springing and fattening their milking cows to sell, because they would not continue to slave for the people in the towns. He wanted to ask the Premier why the dairymen were put under the authority of the Price Fixing Commissioner? The Act distinctly said that the Commissioner should deal only with profiteering, so that the Premier had decided that the dairymen were profiteers.

The PREMIER: The Act does not say anything of the sort. It gives permission to fix prices.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: They were going to ask the Premier to relieve the dairymen of the burden. Why keep them subject to the Price Fixing Commissioner?

The PREMIER: Let me ask you a question? Are they not getting the highest price they ever got in Queensland for butter?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Did the Premier know the cost of production? They had to pay double what they used to pay in wages, double for firewood and double for everything. For a small keg of rennet, which they used to get for £2 15s., they had paid as much as £40. Yet the Premier said they were getting a higher price than ever! No doubt, the Premier was aware that the Agricultural Department's return showed that there were 6,000 people in the dairying industry fewer than last year, when there were 3,000 fewer than the year before, so that in two years the number had been reduced by 9,000. At present there was something like £3,000,000 a year coming in from dairy produce, and that amount was distributed amongst the people of Queensland by way of trade. In spite of that, the Government were killing the dairy industry; and if they kept on in the way they were going Queensland would very soon have to import dairy produce from New Zealand, as was done in years gone by. The time would soon come when the people of Queensland would ask the Country party to remedy that position of affairs. Some years ago they were told that they could not make cheese in Queensland, but the farmers struggled on under immense difficulties until they made Queensland the premier cheese producing State in Australia. They exported more cheese now than any other State in Australia.

Mr. KIRWAN: Under a Labour Government.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Not under a Labour Government. The Labour Government were

ruining the dairy industry, and they would ruin any industry. The dead hand of Labour legislation was on everything, and under it everything decayed. Everything they put their hands on withered up and died. This was the encouragement that they got—that they must supply the rich people of Brisbane with cheap food; but they were not going to do it. There was no profiteering in dairying, and yet the Premier had deliberately put the dairymen amongst the profiteers. What did the Government do? Instead of buying meat at 3½d. and selling at 6d, they bought at 3d. and sold at 9d. Was that profiteering, or was it not? Then, to come to the cost of handling these matters. In connection with all other industries the highest agency charge he knew of was 7½ per cent., yet the Government were charging 20 per cent. to-day for handling things for the farmers. Fancy the fruitgrowers being charged 20 per cent. by the Government for handling the fertilisers which they so much needed for their work! He was not foolish enough to believe that the present prices were going to keep up, but he hoped they would keep up for a good while so as to allow the farmers to wipe off their overdrafts and pay off their indebtedness to the storekeepers. If the Premier was certain that there was no profiteering in the dairying industry, would he agree to take it from the control of the Price Fixing Commissioner?

The PREMIER: Will you give me a straight answer to the question I asked you? Is not butter selling at a higher price than ever before in Queensland?

Mr. BEBBINGTON: So was the cost of production. Look at the enormous losses which occurred during the drought. There was a property worth £6,000, in connection with the upkeep of which it took all the money got for the butter, and there was not a single penny to pay wages for three months. Immediately there was an increase in prices, and extra production through rain, they were told they were profiteering. Would the Premier take the dairying industry from the hands of the Price Fixing Commissioner?

The PREMIER: I will answer you when you sit down.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: The Premier might have seen reports in the Southern papers to the effect that the dairymen were speying their cows and cutting up their farms.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: If you make that statement definitely, I will endeavour to get legislation put through before the House rises to stop it.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Was the hon. gentleman going to compel people to keep cows? The hon. gentleman allowed his public servants £1 a week for keeping a horse; the stock inspector, for instance. Would a cow eat less than a horse? (Laughter.) If the Minister would allow the farmers the same amount for keeping their cows as he allowed his public servants for horse feed, they would be perfectly satisfied, and give all their labour in for nothing.

Mr. PETERSON (*Normanby*): He endorsed, in the main, the view of the hon. member for Drayton.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Hear, hear! Come over here.

Mr. PETERSON: There was no necessity for him to go over there, as he could say what he believed to be the truth as far as the dairying industry was concerned where

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he was. (Hear, hear!) He was not in accord with those members who said the dairying industry was a profitable one. He believed that, unless some steps were taken to give the dairymen, together with the rest of the producing community, a reasonable return upon what they produced, dairying and other industries would languish.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. PETERSON: Speaking for his own district, it had pained him very much recently, in connection with the examination made by Mr. Ferry as to what should be the price of butter, to find there were some Labourites who were prepared to go into that inquiry and try and deprive their fellow-workers in the country of a living wage for their produce.

Mr. BERRINGTON: That is right. More shame on them. They are tools of the Government.

Mr. PETERSON: He had felt, at the time, it was his duty to also give evidence, and to show how a community which had been drought-stricken for years were not, even at the present time, on an average basis, getting a fair return for their produce. He regretted very much that Mr. Ferry did not take into consideration the fact that, when the city worker's family commenced work, they were paid award wages in many cases starting at 15s. and up to 30s. a week; but a dairymen's family went to work in the dairy when he or she left school—or before that period—and no sum whatever was credited to the farmer for the services of those children. He made bold to say that if the dairymen were to work on the forty-four hours a week principle, or even eight hours a day, and were to charge up the value of the work of their families in connection with dairying and other work which might be done on the farm, they would find they would not be able to get butter at 2s. 2d. or 2s. 4d. per lb., but it would be more like 4s. per lb.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. PETERSON: He had in his district a State farm. Mr. Ferry, in fixing the price of the worker's commodity, should ascertain what it cost under Government supervision to manufacture a pound of butter. If he did that, and worked those men on the forty-four hours a week basis, he would find he could not consistently have given the verdict he did. Unfortunately, the dairymen did not take advantage of the opportunity which was extended to them. From his own experience in his district, he knew they had a great deal stronger case than that which they had presented, and they had failed lamentably in establishing evidence. But that did not detract from what he knew of the industry. For the last three and a-half years in the Central district the farmers had almost been wiped out of existence as the result of drought conditions. Because the Almighty sent a shower of rain the price-fixing machinery was brought into operation, and no consideration was taken of the cattle lost, of the calves which had died, or of the services of the family. The thing was preposterous. (Hear, hear!) As a member of a farming electorate, he had never found the Minister for Agriculture or the other members of the Government backward in assisting him. But they must not slip superficially over conditions such as those if they wanted Queensland to prosper—if they wanted

to get the workers out of the city into the producing areas. They had to show them that, instead of placing their work on a 100-hour a week basis, they would assess their earnings upon what it cost to produce on a week of forty-four hours. To show how the dairying industry was lagging

[4 p.m.] behind in New South Wales, he would point out the fact that the Labour Minister of the Department of Agriculture there had to call the attention of Judge Rolin to it. He would quote from the "Sydney Morning Herald" of 3rd December, 1920, the following extract from what His Honour had said:—

"His Honour referred to a communication from the Department of Agriculture, the facts of which, he said, were of the utmost gravity. In the communication, said the judge, it was stated that dairying was the third in magnitude of the primary industries of the State. For the industry to have vitality and vigour, it should show, in a new country like this, a yearly expansion in the number of cattle stocked, the amount of dairy produce put on the market, and the number of persons engaged in making their living out of it. The actual state of affairs proved that the industry was not only not making any expansion in any direction, but was actually going back. This was startling, and pointed to the fact which, to those who closely studied dairying matters from the national aspect, had been apparent for some time—that the dairying industry, great though its potentialities were, and large as was the amount of money yearly distributed amongst the dairy farmers, was declining.

"Some strong action to stem the tide was a matter of urgency. Undoubtedly, numbers of those engaged in primary production—dairy section—were leaving that work for other avenues of employment which held out greater inducements. The dairying districts were being denuded of their population, which was migrating to the cities."

What was happening in New South Wales was also happening in Queensland. He was not led away by any book or paper reading, but he must admit, perhaps, as a superficial observer of national things, that there was only one way in which the State could make progress, and that was by assisting in every possible way to increase primary production.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. PETERSON: That could not be done if they said to the worker in the city, "We can give you what the Arbitration Court awards as a minimum," while, on the other hand, they said to the producer, "This is a maximum." They could not carry on like that.

The TREASURER: They did not want to allow the rural worker to go to the court.

Mr. PETERSON: He had voted for the rural worker to go to the court, because the farmer should be in the position which he was going to indicate had resulted from trades union deliberations in Western Australia. They could not expect the dairying industry to expand where they fixed a minimum to be paid in the city and a maximum on the earning capacity of the man on the land. Recently, a Trades Union Congress had sat in Perth, and he would quote from the "Daily Mail" of 1st

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December the following report of that conference:—

"A largely attended cost of living conference at the Trades Hall carried the following resolution:—(a) That the price of wheat for local consumption be based upon the cost of wheat ascertained upon an inquiry, which shall provide for trade union wages and conditions to all labour, including the labour of a farmer's family employed in producing the crop, plus a reasonable profit; (b) for the exportable surplus the Commonwealth and State shall assist in obtaining the highest possible price in the markets of the world; (c) a reserve of wheat equal to one year's requirements, in addition to that necessary for current consumption, should be retained in Australia to cover any contingency that may cause a local shortage of supplies. The conference decided to extend these proposals to a pool for hides, butter, meat, and other primary products. It was also agreed to approve of the principle of co-operation as a means of reducing the cost of living, and to request the unions to join or establish a co-operative society."

If the Trades Union Congress in Western Australia was prepared, at that belated hour, to acknowledge that, it was up to the Queensland trade unions and the Government to do something in that direction also. (Hear, hear!) He hoped that, when Mr. Ferry was again called upon to determine the price of produce, such as butter and cheese, the dairymen generally would attend to their duty a little better than they did recently, and place such facts as they knew were apparent before him; and then he hoped Mr. Ferry would reverse his decision, and see that the dairymen got a fair deal.

Mr. WALKER (*Coorara*) said he was sure they were all glad to hear the speech of the hon. member for Normanby, and, looking at all the circumstances, he could only come to the conclusion that that hon. member's place was on the Opposition side of the House. This Government had never given the farmers any sympathy. The first thing they did was to reduce the price of butter to the farmer to 12s. They did not go fairly into the matter, and take into consideration the drought and other conditions. If the Price Fixing Commissioner had fixed such a price as he did fix when conditions were normal, he would not have been so far out, but he had not taken into consideration the drought and the high cost of living which had prevailed during the last six or seven years. They could come only to the one conclusion, and that was that the Commissioner had been acting under instructions from the Premier, and he would prove it. When the dairymen first made application to the Commissioner for an increase to world's parity, as in all the Australian States, he delayed—willfully delayed—the question. And when they approached the Premier immediately after his return from the old country, and prior to the elections, he played the same way with them by delaying the matter.

The PREMIER: At that time you were trying to make it a political issue—on the eve of the election.

Mr. WALKER: He would point out to the Premier that there was a dairying body

in Brisbane, consisting of delegates appointed from all the dairying companies of Queensland, and politics were never considered at their conferences. Four men were asked to wait on the Premier. He would not see them, but fooled about for four or five days, and then cleared away in an aeroplane.

The PREMIER: How are the butter producers doing in the Gympie district at the present time?

Mr. WALKER: The Premier was jumping away from the question. He would tell them at the right stage how the dairymen were doing in Gympie. After the Premier had left Brisbane, the Price Fixing Commissioner delayed the matter so long that when the elections came on the dairymen had to postpone its consideration. After three or four weeks' electioneering they tried again to meet the Commissioner, and, after some delay, the Commissioner took evidence. He then allowed three ladies, representing the housewives of Brisbane, who knew nothing about the conditions of dairying, to interrupt those proceedings. At those proceedings there was never one word said against the price being raised to London parity. All the evidence was to the contrary. It was then two weeks before the Commissioner could give a decision, and then he said, "We will go back to the old price of 250s. in Queensland," while, at the present time, the price was 274s. in other parts of Australia. That would give them some idea of the administrative methods of Mr. Ferry. He thought it was up to the Government to root him out to-morrow, instead of reducing his salary by £1, as proposed by the hon. member for Marilla.

The TREASURER: He is one of the most competent men in the service.

The PREMIER: Hear, hear!

Mr. WALKER: He was a very serviceable officer to the Government, and all he could say was that he was evidently carrying out instructions from the Government. He had also asked the dairymen to send in a return covering a period of seven years. He further asked them to show their expenses during that term, loss on stock, etc., and other conditions too numerous to mention. The return he asked for was an impossible one. No dairyman could give such a return truthfully. The result was, very few put them in.

The TREASURER: The integrity of the Commissioner is above suspicion.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: He is carrying out your orders.

Mr. WALKER: He did not know anything about the Commissioner's integrity, but he was certainly an incompetent man, and should never have been appointed to the position he now held. The Government were not "playing the game" at all. He got certain replies from the Treasurer to questions which he had asked, but he would give some figures to show what the producers of Gympie district were losing by the action of the Price Fixing Commissioner. Owing to the action of the Commissioner in not allowing the producers world's parity, the producers in the Gympie district in the last three months lost £7,724 14s. 8d.

The PREMIER: Tell us the whole story. Tell us what they are getting now, as compared with previous years.

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Mr. WALKER: He would make a comparison even in that direction. In the Gympie district, in 1917, the average dairyman supplying cream received £227. Out of that, he had to pay for forage and for depreciation, and he had to maintain his family. In 1918 the average dairy farmer received £203; and in 1919 the average for each dairy farmer, so far as the Gympie factory was concerned, was £200.

The PREMIER: What is it now?

Mr. WALKER: The Gympie factory made 30 tons of butter last week, and they distributed amongst the settlers of that district a little over £500,000 a year, which was more money than ever the Gympie district produced in gold in three years.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. WALKER: Owing to the action of the present Government, the dairymen were deprived of world's parity for their butter, which meant that they would lose, as he had stated, £7,724 14s. 8d. That money would have kept the whole of the unemployed in the Gympie district at work.

The PREMIER: Your figures show that Gympie is producing more wealth from butter at present than was ever produced from gold.

Mr. WALKER: Yes, that was so. There were large areas now under grass, and more people were going in for dairying. There were 2,000 more settlers on the Cooroora roll than were on the roll when the redistribution of seats took place. That showed that the district was growing through the settlement of dairymen.

The PREMIER: That is the kind of ruin you talk about.

Mr. WALKER: What would it be if the dairyman had received that extra £7,724 14s. 8d.? Look what it would have meant to spend that money in the district! If the Premier went up there now, he would see poverty in different parts of the district owing to the effects of the drought. If Mr. Ferry had gone up to Gympie, and asked for the particular figures he wanted from the butter factory, it would have been a far better method than the one he adopted.

Mr. BRENNAN: Has he not done that?

Mr. WALKER: No. The Commissioner had done nothing.

Mr. BRENNAN: I say he has. I have got the figures.

Mr. WALKER: The hon. member did not know anything about it. If the hon. member could prove that Mr. Ferry went up to the Gympie district to get information, he (Mr. Walker) would give £5 to the Brisbane Hospital, provided that the hon. member would do the same if he were proved to be wrong.

Mr. BRENNAN: Make it the Roma Hospital, and I will take you up.

Mr. WALKER: He would make it the Brisbane Hospital.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Roma is in Queensland.

Mr. WALKER: He recently had a letter from the Atherton district, in the electorate of the Secretary for Agriculture, where they were complaining about the same thing.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: What did they tell you?

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Mr. WALKER: The Atherton people said they were in sympathy with the evidence given by the dairymen before the Price Fixing Commissioner, because the same thing was prevailing up there at the present time.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: I have got all their statements here.

Mr. WALKER: If the Minister was prepared to take up the same wager that he had just made, he would make the same offer to him. Just now the cheques in connection with the dairying industry were good, but they had to take into consideration the conditions that have been prevailing during the last two or three years. In other States the dairymen got 2s. 9d. per lb., while in Queensland it was only 2s. 2½d. or 2s. 3d. per lb. That was not giving the dairymen a square deal.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: What was the highest cheque paid in your district last month?

Mr. WALKER: He was not supposed to divulge that information, but it averaged about £200 per dairyman.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Will you give £5 to the hospital if it is not more than that?

Mr. WALKER: There was no occasion for any alarm about the matter. (Government laughter.) He signed a good many cheques, and it might be a few shillings more than the amount he gave. At any rate, he gave a fair and square answer to the question. The Minister would know, as a director of a company, that he had no right to divulge any cheques at all, but he could say that the average was about £200 for each family for the year. The men who got the biggest cheques employed a lot of labour and had to buy in an enormous amount of fodder. Some of them had to spend a lot of money in re-stocking their herds.

The House resumed.

COMMONWEALTH BANK AGREEMENT RATIFICATION AND STATE ADVANCES BILL.

ASSENT.

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

SUPPLY.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE.

Mr. WALKER (continuing): Although the cheques paid by the Gympie factory had no bearing on the vote under discussion, he would give the amounts paid to the Minister for Agriculture just to satisfy his curiosity. He could assure the Committee that during the year 1919-20 the cheques paid averaged £200 for each family.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Can you give me the cheques for last month?

Mr. WALKER: Covering the periods he had just referred to, the average would be about £200 per family. If the Commissioner had gone into this question, it would have been fair to the whole industry and to the consumer. Instead of that, Ferry heard evidence from certain people, each one of

whom spoke for himself, but did not represent any district or any factory.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Why didn't your company send down representatives and put forward good evidence?

Mr. WALKER: They knew full well that the Commissioner was going to carry out the instructions of the Government. The Commissioner delayed and dallied and wasted seven weeks before he made his report. That made them think that the Government were not in earnest at all. Even at this late hour, in spite of the fact that they were losing nearly £8,000 every three months, the Government should come forward and give the dairymen a fair chance to give evidence. The Government should put in another Price Fixing Commissioner altogether. If this man Ferry had been sincere in regard to his position, or if he had been up to the standard of a Commissioner, he would have taken into consideration the poor prices which the farmers were getting for their products at the present time. If they took potatoes, cabbages, peas, and other agricultural products, they would see that they were realising poor prices in the markets to-day. In fact, they were almost given away. Just because the dairyman was getting a fair price in the old country for his butter, the Government wanted to cut him down. One way to settle the question was to do away with the price fixer and his staff altogether. (Hear, hear!) It was costing over £4,000 per year, and they could save that amount. Let the producers compete in the world's markets and [4.30 p.m.] get what they could for their products, according to the law of supply and demand. By doing that they would give the dairymen a square deal. Under the administration of the present Minister for Agriculture there was no sympathy extended to the man on the land at all. So far as the dairying industry was concerned, the Minister for Agriculture had been a sad disappointment.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Do you remember that two or three nights ago you told me some of the farmers in your district were making little fortunes? (Disorder.)

Hon. W. H. BARNES: A very distinct breach of etiquette.

Mr. WALKER: The Minister was going to open a show for him and got certain information from him privately, and when he came into the House—(Uproar.)

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Order!

The PREMIER: Why do you not be honest and say it publicly?

Mr. WALKER: His character would bear more than the Premier's, and he had been longer in the House. (Renewed uproar.) He had given the Committee figures in reference to his district, and the Premier could send up an auditor or an inspector and have those figures verified. What he had said was the truth and the whole truth.

The PREMIER: The fact is that you admit privately they are doing well.

Mr. WALKER: He had never admitted to the Premier they were doing well.

The PREMIER: Privately you admit they are doing well, and publicly you take up another attitude.

Mr. WALKER: Did the Premier say that he had admitted they were doing well?

The PREMIER: Yes.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: I say you did.

Mr. WALKER: It was not true. Individual dairymen who were not hit by the drought—and everyone knew on the land there were certain favoured areas—and who had lost no stock, had come out of the whole position fairly well; but when they struck an average the dairymen were not doing well. For the hon. member to come and interpose private stuff talked out of the House and put a different construction on it altogether was not "playing the game," nor was the Premier "playing the game."

The PREMIER: How?

Mr. WALKER: By backing up information of that description.

The PREMIER: I say that if a man holds a private opinion and is not prepared to state it publicly, he is not honest.

Mr. WALKER: Did the Premier say he was not honest?

The PREMIER: I say you hold private opinions that you are not game to express publicly.

Mr. WALKER: He did not fear the Premier or anybody else, and what he told the Minister privately was perfectly true. There was nothing to hide.

The PREMIER: Then why complain because the statement was made?

Mr. WALKER: He asked the Minister to open the Pomona show and gave him certain information with regard to the district to help him.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: There was nothing to do with the show.

Mr. WALKER: And he apologised for the hon. member's absence when he was unable to go. For the Premier to back up the Minister in that direction was wrong altogether. (Disorder.)

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Order! These interjections from both sides of the Committee must cease. Of late the number of interjections in Committee has been altogether too many. Hon. members on both sides will recognise that this disorderly conduct must cease and allow the hon. member to continue his speech without interruption.

Mr. WALKER: What he told the Minister privately he was prepared to say there or anywhere else, with regard to individual men. He knew a farmer in his district, formerly a member of that House, who was doing remarkably well, but he was not affected by the drought. He gave the Minister several instances, but to say that he was not prepared to say it in the House was not "playing the game," and he was surprised at the Premier's backing up a remark of that kind.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. WALKER: He was perfectly in order in replying when a member said a thing of that sort. He was not used to men saying that kind of thing.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. member to address himself to the subject before the Committee.

Mr. Walker.]

Mr. WALKER: The Chairman must admit that he was entitled to reply.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member has replied and the incident must now close.

Mr. WALKER: So long as he had convinced the hon. members he was right, he was perfectly satisfied to go on. The Government were wrong, firstly in making out that the dairy farmer was a profiteer, and secondly wrong in giving the Commissioner information as to when he should take evidence and when not, as was done during the election time.

The PREMIER: Do you say this Government gives instructions to the Commissioner?

Mr. WALKER: All he could say was that by the papers—

The bell indicated that the hon. member's time had expired.

Mr. BRENNAN (*Toowoomba*): He had listened with some interest and a certain amount of alarm to the hon. member for Coorooora. He had been on the Downs many years, and he was acquainted with the farmers just as much as those who were associated with the land directly. The amount on the Estimates should be passed, because they had in Mr. Ferry one of the most competent and able men in Queensland for the position of Price Fixing Commissioner. The whole dispute hinged on the question whether the farmer was to get world's parity for butter for home consumption. In 1916 the State price for butter was 126s. per cwt., and in that year was increased to 150s. by the present Government, at the farmers' request. At the end of 1916 the Federal Government took control and fixed the price at 170s. In 1917, the best year they had had up to that time for several years, the price went to 155s., and in August, 1918, the Federal Government, by agreement with the Imperial Government, fixed it at 175s. During that period the world's parity was 175s., and when the State again took control the Price Fixing Commissioner fixed the price for butter for home consumption at 223s. 6d. That was the man members opposite were abusing—who, because he knew a drought was on, gave them 223s. 3d. when the world's parity was 175s.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Nonsense!

Mr. BRENNAN: No one roared for world's parity then. In August, 1920, the local price was raised to 238s. at the request of the farmers, and the Imperial price then was 240s. By agreement in August, 1920, between the Imperial and Federal Governments, the price to the Imperial Government was fixed at 274s., and the farmers asked that the local price should be increased to 274s. instead of world's parity. The other day, the cheese manufacturers came to the Commissioner with tears in their voice, and said: "For God's sake, don't give us world's parity, give us a halfpenny over it, or our factories will close." The hon. member for Drayton knew that that was so.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. member to address the Chair.

Mr. BRENNAN: The hon. member for Drayton was a cheese manufacturer, and supplied his local factory, and in August of this year, he went to the Commissioner, who fixed the price at 1s. 2½d. per lb., as against the world's parity of 1s. 1½d.—the very man whom they scandalised and abused saved them from closing their factories, according to their own statements. In the time of the

[*Mr. Walker.*

Nationalist Government—and some of the Nationalist members of days gone by had camouflaged themselves amongst the Country party—(laughter)—they were getting from 6d. to 10d. for their butter.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Never! Never!

Mr. BRENNAN: In 1914, they were getting 10d.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: That was cream—you don't know the difference between butter and cream.

Mr. BRENNAN: They were getting about three times the price under the present Government, and when they were supplying under the National regime, the middle man was cornering the market in Sydney, and in Melbourne and Brisbane, creating a world's parity for himself. Because the Government had assisted the farmers by giving them an opportunity to export and get a big price, they came along and wanted the workers to pay more than it was worth to them. The hon. member for Drayton said the other night, that they should not allow any more production, that they should not allow men to go on the land to produce butter, that they should do as the industrialists did, who would not allow their industries to be flooded. They should not allow any more production, he said, because prices would come down.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: What about the one-ton silo?

Mr. BRENNAN: If the farmers could only be educated to have one ton, or two, or three tons of silage conserved, they would not have all this concern. On the Downs at present there was fodder 6 feet high. The farmers should be cutting it now, and conserving it against the next drought, but the agitators on the other side had got the farmers excited and worked up. If they talked long enough, he was afraid they would have the unfortunate farmers believing them. The farmers had been very well treated by the Government. In July, 1920, the production of butter was 49,325 boxes, in August 46,956 boxes, in September 52,927 boxes, and in October 53,076 boxes.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: And what was the cost of producing it?

Mr. BRENNAN: It was less this year than last year. He was showing that the farmers were having a better time now than ever before in the history of Queensland. In the month of October in each year from 1915, the production at the Roma factory was as follows:—1915, value £347; 1916, £704; 1917, £2,130; 1918, £556; 1919, £484; 1920, £4,472.

Mr. EDWARDS: What was the average?

Mr. BRENNAN: He did not care what the average was. The output had increased from £448 to £4,472 this year, and yet that was an industry which had been crippled.

An OPPOSITION MEMBER: Quite true.

Mr. BRENNAN: Hon. members opposite were a lot of hypocrites. At the inquiry, a farmer named Titmarsh, who had been a miner till he was forty-seven years of age, said that it cost 6s. 9d. per lb. to produce butter, and if he got 5s. per lb., he would not stop at it. Then Holst, of Oakey, said that in 1917—which was the best year Queensland had had for some time—it cost 9s. 3d. to produce butter.

Mr. EDWARDS: Do you believe it?

Mr. BRENNAN: Did he believe it? (Laughter.)

Mr. EDWARDS: Absolutely correct.

Mr. BRENNAN: Their great Mr. Potts, of the Government institution at Gatton, who exported his produce to Jackson and Company, and had a herd of twenty-five bulls and sixty cows, said it took him 1s. 9d. to produce butter in 1917, but he did not know how he arrived at the estimate. That was the man they had to teach the farmers—they should look into Mr. Potts.

Hon. W. H. BARNES: Victimisation! That is your side all over.

Mr. BRENNAN: The great Mr. Plunkett came down to Brisbane to see the Price Fixing Commissioner, and also Mr. Harris, secretary of the Farmers' Association, but neither of those men saw fit to give evidence on behalf of the farmers. Mr. Plunkett, in answer to the housewives, stated that he had no practical witnesses, because it was the busiest and most prosperous time the farmers had ever had during the last ten years. Then they had another farmer, who said it did not pay him to produce butter; that he had started farming in 1912 with a capital of £250, and to-day his assets were worth £5,494. Another farmer said that in 1895 he got 6d. per lb. for his butter, and now he was getting 2s. 1½d. per lb. He made his own butter. It was all right now under a Labour Government. Those were the people who were not called to give evidence. At the present time the average cow would bring in the farmer £3 per month. He could produce any amount of evidence to show that a farmer could buy a fair average dairy cow for £10, and fair average dairy land was worth about £5 an acre, notwithstanding that the hon. member for Drayton said the value of land was down to nothing on account of the land taxation. The trouble was that some of the farmers were so greedy that, as soon as their herbage was sufficiently high, they overstocked and made no provision for a drought season. When a dry season came along they had no fodder, and they could not afford to buy it. If they did conserve their lucerne hay, and a middleman came along and offered £3 or £4 a ton more than it was worth when it was put in the stack, the farmer was so busy making money in order to buy more land that he was ready to sell his lucerne hay and leave his cattle unprotected in a dry season. Of course, when a dry season came along he had to buy his lucerne hay back at £20 a ton, and then he put that against the cost of production. The farmer would tell you that he was better off to-day than ever he had been. There was no reason why the farmer should get world's parity for butter, because the farmer knew he was getting a very good return at the present time. The Government were not responsible for droughts, and all they could do was to instruct the farmer to conserve fodder in times of plenty and not overstock his farm, and then in a time of drought he would not lose his stock.

Mr. CORSER (*Burnett*): He did not think the farmers would agree with the statements made by the hon. member for Toowoomba, nor did he think the farmers of Queensland had asked that hon. member to express an opinion so vital to their interests. The hon. member said the farmers were satisfied; but if he had had sufficient interest in the matter to have reviewed the evidence

given before the Price Fixing Commissioner by the farmers themselves, he would not have made such a statement. Anyone who read the evidence would understand all the troubles and trials that the farmers really had suffered during the last few years, and members on the Government benches would then probably realise what the country section of the Opposition were endeavouring to do. If those farmers were so satisfied, how was it that Government members were not altogether pleased with the actions of the Government? They had an exhibition that afternoon of a Government member criticising the actions of the Government in the handling of the farmers' produce. The hon. member for Normanby spoke about real Labour Governments in the other States, indicating that the Government in Queensland was not a real Labour Government in his opinion. If the hon. member for Normanby really meant to do some good to the farmers, he should show his *bonâ fides* by voting with the Opposition on the amendment.

The HOME SECRETARY: Which party do you belong to?

Mr. CORSER: To the Country party—the party representing the desires and aims of a great section of the country. The Country party understood the droughts that the farmers had gone through; and when they saw a big cheque from a dairy company they did not say, "Look at this man's monthly income." It was probably the income derived from many pairs of hands that worked from morning till night and not eight hours a day or forty hours a week, and they had no bank holidays.

The HOME SECRETARY: Has not butter increased in price in about the same ratio as other commodities?

Mr. CORSER: Butter had not increased in price to the extent that it had in Victoria and New South Wales, but the farmer had to pay increased prices for commodities he required. If a primary producer wished to secure those commodities which were essential in the working of his farm, he had to pay through the nose for them. The price of all those things which were required on the farm had been fixed at a fairly high rate, while the price of all those things produced on the farm had been cut down to such an extent that a sufficient remuneration had not been provided for the farmers. The hon. member for Toowoomba had spoken about the progress of the industry. He would give the real figures, not from his own statements, but from the report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for 1919-20. According to that report, in 1917 there were 33,930,000 lb. of butter produced; in 1918 there was a reduction of 6,000,000 lb.; and in 1919 there was a further reduction of 6,000,000 lb., the quantity produced in 1919 being 25,000,000 lb.

At five minutes to 5 o'clock p.m.,

Mr. KIRWAN (*Brisbane*) took the chair as Temporary Chairman.

Mr. CORSER: Where was the marked development that had been spoken of by the hon. member for Toowoomba? They had something more to regret, and that was that the price-fixing was not constituted in such a way as to inspire confidence among the primary producers. Previous to the election the Minister for Agriculture and other members of the Government said that the Commonwealth Government were depriving

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ing the farmer of the full price of his product. Those statements, no doubt, were afterwards forgotten by a number of Government supporters, but there was an election a month or two ago, and the farmers were then hoodwinked and pushed aside in connection with their desire for an increased price, by being told that if they brought evidence along it would be weighed, and the Government would consider whether or not it was a fair thing to increase the price of butter. Mr. Ferry was to handle the matter, and from the platform the country candidates told the farmers that they would not get an increase; that the Government were only hoodwinking them until the elections were over, and that had been proved to be the case. Why was it that there was this want of confidence in the Commissioner and the department? If they took up the "Standard," of 20th September, during the time of the election, when all Government departments should be free of party politics, they found that the Price Fixing Commissioner was working against the interests of the primary producer. In the "Standard" of that date there was a statement issued by Mr. Ferry showing how much his department, established by a Labour Government, had saved the consumers of Queensland. In that statement he made a boast that in four months' operations of the Act he had saved the people of Queensland in groceries alone a sum of £200,000. As a matter of fact, the only foodstuffs that had been reduced in price were the products of the primary producers, and by his figures the Commissioner showed that he had made a reduction, in the price of butter alone, of £91,000 a year. If that reduction was correct, then £91,000 had been denied to the farmers of Queensland by his action in reducing the price of butter since he took the office of Commissioner. Since that time the farmers had also been refused an increase equal to London parity, although it was

[5 p.m.] provided by a Labour Government in New South Wales and the Government of Victoria. Yet

it was found that on the eve of an election the Price Fixing Commissioner had published some evidence to try and show why the consumers of Queensland should vote for the Government. Despite that, however, the majority of the people had voted against the Government, and, unfortunately, the Government was to-day in the hands of those representing only a minority of the people. The Government had been backed up with regard to the Price Fixing Commissioner by the Housewives' Association of Brisbane. The Government told the farmers in the House that they were their friends, but through the Housewives' Association, who were present at the inquiry to voice the sentiments of Labour, they did all they could to hold back from the farmer the price received in the other States. Was it fair that such an association should be allowed to take possession of an inquiry of such importance as the one which they had interrupted? If the Commissioner had been of an open mind, and not influenced by the Housewives' Association, how could he say the increase was not warranted since all the evidence was that the price was too low to secure proper remuneration for the work they had done and some compensation for the years of drought? The drought and consequent misfortunes had not been taken into consideration at all.

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A statement had been made regarding the evidence of Mr. Potts, Principal of the Agricultural College at Gatton, and an insinuation equal to an intended victimisation of that gentleman was also made. If there was to be any victimisation because that man gave an honest and fair report on the price of a commodity produced at Gatton College, the dairyman must and would have something to say in protection of a man who gave honest evidence. He would like to quote a statement which had been made by the Minister for Agriculture on the 27th March of this year, before he thought the farmers would be submitting the matter to the Price Fixing Commissioner, and before he thought a new election was coming on. This is what the Minister said—

"The butter producers had not got all they were entitled to, compared with what the European producers had realised. They were receiving 150s. to 170s. for their product, whilst Danish butter sold at 500s., and the Australian product abroad was sold at 50s. to 100s. higher than the price the producers received. One reason why the State should exercise control was because 10 per cent. of the cheese and 36 per cent. of the butter produced in Queensland was exported, whilst 90 per cent. of the cheese and 64 per cent. of the butter was consumed within the State. That indicated the importance of dual control."

Yet to-day Government members said the farmer was getting enough, and that the farmer himself was satisfied! He hoped that some action would be taken to protect the interest of the primary producer when it was threatened that, probably owing to a large amount of production, a commodity was going to be placed on the market at too low a price. The commodity he was referring to was maize. If the Commissioner wanted to exercise himself in the interests of the State to the benefit of the primary producer, let him fix for the maize producer to-day, not a maximum, but a minimum price, equal to a fair remuneration for the work, and a price which would provide a living wage. Let him collect evidence to protect the producer. Up to the present he had acted to the detriment of the primary producer. They were not looking for a maize pool, because of the industrial conditions and machinery which had been added to the wheat pool, which would only act to the detriment of the producers and upset the industrial conditions on the farms. To-day both sides were satisfied. Therefore, till they could get what they wanted, they had to look for assistance in the fixing of a price. It was hoped that for items such as barbed wire, iron, and timber—whether State or not—the price would be controlled, and protection given to the primary producer. He hoped the Government would listen to the remarks of members from those districts, who had been elected in the interests of those people, and not in the interests of a section which was only aiming to bring about low prices for the consumers in the city.

Mr. FORDE (*Rockhampton*) was very pleased to hear from hon. members opposite that the farmers were doing well at present. It was very gratifying information to members on that side, who were solicitous for the welfare of the whole community, and not of any one section. They did not begrudge the farmers all they were getting at present,

because they had had particularly bad times in years gone by. It was with a view to assisting the man on the land that they agreed to introduce the Wheat Pool Bill, which hon. members opposite endeavoured to hold up by stonewalling and bringing forward frivolous objections for hours and hours in the House.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: It is not costing the Government a penny.

Mr. FORDE: The hon. member for Drayton had the reputation of being the "member for butter," but he had not added much to it in his speech this afternoon. The Country party lived on the farmers, just like the member for Dalby, who farmed the farmers and farmed the farmers' representatives. They could not get a farmer to lead them, so they had to get a lawyer. He had an opportunity of travelling through the country, and learning the conditions of the man on the land. (Opposition laughter.) Hon. members opposite could laugh, but for half of his life he had lived in the country, and since he had been a member of Parliament he had toured the country districts in Central Queensland, in company with the hon. member for Keppel and the hon. member for Normanby. That made him acquainted with the conditions of the man on the land, and he knew more about them than many members sitting on the Opposition benches.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: No, no.

Mr. FORDE: The hon. member for Normanby took a very keen interest in the struggling farmers in the Wowan and Dawson Valley districts, and he had done more for them by visiting Ministers, and calling at the different departments, and using his influence in other ways than any member on the Opposition side had done. (Hear, hear!) He (Mr. Forde) was also concerned about the poor people, and the little children who had to go without butter. Hon. members opposite did not care a snap of the fingers for these people, who existed in the country as well as in the cities. While travelling through the country districts, he visited some struggling farmers. They always treated him hospitably, although many of them could not afford to have any butter. He was anxious that everybody in Queensland should be able to get butter. The Labour Government in Queensland had done more for the man on the land than any other previous Government had done, and if hon. members opposite were sincere in their advocacy in favour of the man on the land, they would support what the Government had done. The hon. member for Drayton talked a great deal, but did very little. The hon. member for Coorooora referred to the Price Fixing Commissioner as "this man Ferry." It was a pity that the hon. gentleman could not refer to a man holding a high and honourable position in a more dignified manner. It was generally conceded throughout Queensland that Mr. Ferry was one of the ablest men in the public service to-day.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Then, why doesn't he go on the evidence, and not by orders?

Mr. FORDE: The hon. member for Coorooora also said, "Do away with the Price Fixing Commissioner." One would think the hon. gentleman was the representative of the profiteers in the community; and no doubt, his sympathies were more with the profiteers than they were with the genuine

farmers. The Price Fixing Commissioner had been responsible for saving to the producers of Queensland something in the vicinity of £300,000.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Where did he do that?

Mr. FORDE: On those lines in which profiteering went on in Queen street, Brisbane. The Price Fixing Commissioner was out to do a fair thing by the whole of the people of Queensland, and they should assist him in every way they could. Hon. members opposite would not give the Commissioner credit for being honest. The proper thing to do was to examine the cost of production, and fix a price which would secure the producer a reasonable profit. Every decision that the Commissioner arrived at was actuated by the highest motives, and with a desire to do a fair thing by the people of Queensland. Members opposite were great believers in Mr. William Morris Hughes, who, when receiving a farmers' deputation in Sydney the other day said, in regard to the request for world's parity, "It is a glittering bubble which might be followed too far." They knew that the Queensland Labour Government supplied arsenic to the farmers at from £10 to £25 per ton, whereas if they were paying the market price, they would be paying £85 per ton. They did not want world's parity there. Members opposite only wanted world's parity on one line, when it suited them. Then, again, through the action of the Price Fixing Commissioner the farmers were able to purchase fertilisers at prices not exceeding £20, although the price was £45 in the East. Would the hon. member for Drayton be in favour of fixing the price of fertilisers at £45 per ton, or world's parity, and thus rob the farmers of £25 per ton? The Commissioner was inquiring into the matter at present. He would quote the prices of fertilisers in the different States—

"In comparison with the other States, the following figures would show that the meatworks, gas companies, etc., had been charging the farmers of Queensland excessive rates for all kinds of fertilisers—

"Bone and blood manure—Brisbane, £13 10s.; Sydney, £9 11s.; Melbourne, £7 10s.

"Orchard manure—Brisbane, £13 10s.; Sydney, £10 13s. 10d.

"Superphosphate—Brisbane, £8; Sydney, £5 13s. 6d.; Melbourne, £5 10s.

"Sulphate of ammonia—Brisbane, £27; Sydney, £20; Melbourne, £20.

"Muriate of potash—Brisbane, £36; Sydney, £28 18s.; Melbourne, £24 10s.

"Immediate action was being taken to reduce the price of fertilisers."

The Price Fixing Commissioner was arranging with the Australian gas companies for a supply of sulphate of ammonia for £20 per ton. Previously, the price was £25 per ton, so the farmers would be saved £5 per ton. That showed that the Commissioner was acting in the interests of the people. If he wanted to fix world's parity, it would not be beneficial to the producer in that particular line. Then, the cheese manufacturers said that if they had to accept London prices for their local sales, it would close their factories up altogether. The cheese industry was a very important industry. The hon. member for Drayton knew something about cheese. Not long ago the price of butter was 22s. per cwt., and the export price was

175s. The export price was increased to 242s., and the local price was increased to 238s., which was equivalent to the export price. He pointed out that in 1914, the last year of the Denham Government, the farmers were only getting 10d. per lb. for their butter, while to-day, under a Labour Government, the farmers were getting 2s. 4d. per lb. for their butter. A farmer told him that in "the good old days"—in 1895—he used to get 6½d. per lb. for his butter. Yet, to-day, the farmers were getting 2s. 4d. per lb.! There had been a general uplift all round, because of the advent of the great Labour movement. To hear hon. members opposite speak, one would have thought that the Government did nothing for the man on the land, yet they knew that the Government distributed 87,700 bushels of seed wheat to the farmers at 7s. per bushel, when the prevailing price was 7s. 4d. per bushel.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I would remind the hon. gentleman that we are not discussing seed wheat at present.

Mr. FORDE: He was just pointing out what the Government had done for the man on the land, who got cheap seed wheat, also a reduction in his fodder, and rebates on his travelling stock. Did not the Government remove the railway guarantee, and save the farmers £250,000? They knew that the Profiteering Act was assented to on the 11th March, 1920, and on the 29th March the wholesale price of sugar in the refineries was increased by the Commonwealth Government to £49 per ton. The retail price was increased from 3½d. to 6d. per lb., and many retailers and wholesale merchants increased the price of sugar they had in stock. On the 27th March the first proclamation under the Profiteering Prevention Act was issued, and it prohibited an increased price being charged for sugar that was not in the refineries at that time. It also prohibited an increase in the price of jam, condensed milk, and confectionery. That meant a great saving to thousands of people throughout Queensland, not only to the people in the city areas, but to the people in the country districts as well.

At thirty minutes past 5 o'clock p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. FORDE (continuing): It was estimated that the saving through the action of the Price Fixing Commissioner was, approximately, £20,000 on sugar, £50,000 on jam and condensed milk, and £10,000 on confectionery. It was calculated that the savings on grocery lines alone amounted to £20,000 a month, and yet the hon. member for Cooroora had the effrontery to tell them that the Commissioner should be dismissed, or they should do away with the fixation of prices altogether.

Mr. WALKER: Pass him out.

Mr. FORDE: Probably the hon. member would, and allow the profiteers of Brisbane and Queensland to go in for their old, sweet way of filching from the people the exorbitant prices they were allowed to get under the sympathetic Commonwealth Nationalist party, because they helped the Nationalist party funds. Owing to the work of that same Commissioner, they had saved to the people, approximately, £8,000 a month on draperies, and after about four months' operation of the Act the total estimated saving to the community was about £200,000. To-day it must be about £300,000, and after

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ten months it would mean that £500,000 would be in the pockets of the people of Queensland, instead of in the pockets of the profiteering interests which were represented by the hon. member for Bulimba and other members opposite. They, on that side, stood for giving the farmer a fair and reasonable price in every possible way, just as they had in times of drought given him fodder and seed wheat. (Opposition laughter.) Hon. members did not like to hear such things. They did not like to hear that the previous Government made the farmers guarantee railways against loss, and that the present Government wiped that system out and saved to the farmers £250,000.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. FORDE: As a result of the work of the Price Fixing Commissioner, the purchasing power of the sovereign was greater in Queensland than in any other State in Australia. Between January and June of this year the cost of living in the principal cities had increased per unit of £1 as follows:—

	s.	d.
" Adelaide	4	5
Perth	4	4
Melbourne	3	10
Sydney	3	6
Hobart	3	4
Brisbane	2	2"

The Government did not stand for any small section of the people, but for giving a fair deal to the men in the cities and to the men on the land—for treating the whole community in a fair and equitable manner—and, he felt sure, the people outside the House, who were the people who really counted, and for whom they should cater, would never forget the action of the Government in introducing the price-fixation legislation, and so saving the people in a few months £300,000. The farmers of Queensland, fair-minded as the great majority of them were, would think more of the representatives of the Government, because they believed that the Government stood, not only in the interests of the people in the cities, not for the interests of any section, but for the interests of the whole of the people, and that was why they confidently looked forward to the support and endorsement of the majority of the fair-minded farmers of Queensland.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. W. COOPER (*Rosewood*): He had listened with amusement to some of the statements that had been made, particularly by those who represented farmers. He happened to stand in a unique position, because he was the only man on that side representing a farming constituency in Southern Queensland, after the great stampede that had been made by the men on the other side.

Mr. FORDE: By misrepresentation.

Mr. W. COOPER: By nothing less than misrepresentation. He was not going to say anything with regard to the new members, but he felt sure that it was only under pressure that members who previously represented farming constituencies in the House had joined what was known as the Primary Producers' Union. They saw the writing on the wall, but had not the courage of their convictions, or they would have stayed with the Nationalist party they had always stood for. The member for Burnett and the member for Cooroora—

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. W. COOPER: And many others had taken up that attitude with respect to their friends the Nationalists. To give the primary producer justice, he felt that they, as a Government, should withdraw anything in the shape of price-fixing of cheese and other primary products of Queensland.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Come over here.

Mr. W. COOPER: He was not going over there, because he was quite capable of holding his own on the Government side. He stood for a principle, and was prepared to assist his colleagues in endeavouring, at all events, to withdraw anything that might be detrimental to the primary producer, so far as price fixing was concerned. (Hear, hear!) The fact remained, however, that members opposite were hypocritically putting up a stunt for political purposes, having in view their return at the next election—because he was quite satisfied that if they took up any other attitude they would not be returned. He believed they had to take into consideration the whole of the people of Queensland. Farmers in his electorate had told him they were quite satisfied with the price they were getting at the present time, but they believed they had a right to get as much as it was possible for them to get, that whilst they were being treated very fairly by the Government, and with respect to price fixing, they had a right, if one State could get London parity for the products they produced, to export those products from the State which they were in. He agreed, because he was quite satisfied that if the people of New South Wales and Victoria were prepared to pay London parity for the products of the primary producer, then so should the people of Queensland, but there was one thing they had forgotten in making charges against the Government—that it was not only price fixing that particularly concerned them. In his district, the dairying industry would have gone down, no doubt, but that the Government took up the matter of finding water for them, and he wanted to thank the Minister for endeavouring, at all events, to relieve the farmers from the distress in which they had found themselves during the dry season.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: What did they do?

Mr. W. COOPER: They made a request to the Lands Department for the services of a water diviner, and the only charge they made was 10s., whereas, he understood that rumour said that the hon. member for Drayton had received as much as £75 for one site fixed by him as a diviner.

Mr. WALKER: He came into my electorate, and found sites on two farms and charged nothing.

Mr. W. COOPER: He was a friend of the hon. member. The price of 55 per cent. of Queensland butter had been fixed at 238s. per 100 lb., whilst for the remaining 45 per cent., for export they could receive 274s. They had to consider whether they would be doing their duty to the people of the whole of Queensland if they committed the whole of their butter to be exported. The duty of any Government was to protect its own people so far as possible, having regard to the industries concerned. The primary producers had not got a fair deal from past Governments. When they were under the control of the Commonwealth Government Mr. Hughes fixed the price much lower than the rate fixed by the present Queensland

Government, and members opposite never made any protest, but the moment the State Government stepped in—a party which had always been their political opponents—they made a great outcry. They had to consider the whole of the people.

Mr. MORGAN: Do you think a fair price has been fixed?

Mr. W. COOPER: He did not think a fair price had been fixed. The primary producer, during the past five years, had not had a fair deal, not only from the Federal Government, but also from the State Government. He was at the Rockhampton Labour Conference in 1916, and he had opposed price-fixing under any consideration so far as dairying was concerned; but at the same time it had to be remembered that the Commissioner had also fixed the price of other commodities which the farmers used. The farmer would have been infinitely worse off if the Price Fixing Commissioner had not been appointed at all. The responsibility for the evidence given before the Price Fixing Commissioner, so far as the dairying industry was concerned, rested with members of the Opposition, because they took good care not to get men who were in a prosperous condition to give evidence. A man engaged in the dairying industry, who was the largest landholder with the exception of two in the Rosewood electorate, had told him that he was quite satisfied with what the Government had done, and he pointed out that the howl that come from the other side of the Chamber in regard to better conditions for the dairyman was the result of a selfish motive on their part. He said, while those men endeavoured to get men to go to the front, they were prepared to accept the maximum price they could possibly get for their butter and thus bring about deplorable conditions for the wives and children of the men who went to the front. Again, many of the butter factories donated tons of butter, or the price of the butter, to patriotic purposes. Did they consider those men when they were giving away, without authority, something that belonged to the farmers who produced the butter? While those men did that, they had the audacity to come to the Chamber and pose as the friends of the primary producers. When they got outside, members opposite said the farmers were doing really well, but for political reasons they would not say so in the House. He was prepared to say that the farmer had a right to the full reward of his industry, the same as any other man; but at the same time he (Mr. Cooper) was not hypocrite enough to come to the House and camouflage the issue before the Chamber.

Mr. WARREN (*Murrumbidgee*): The question of the fixation of prices was a very vital one to the dairymen. He did not for a moment think that the fixing of prices was going to solve the problem of the high cost of living, and the dairymen felt at the present juncture, owing to the terrible sufferings they had endured, that it was a stab in the back. Members on the Government side boasted that they were the friends of the farmers. If that was so, he said again, "God save the farmers from their friends!" A good deal had been said in regard to the conditions on the dairy farms, and he would like the Price Fixing Commissioner to go out into the country and see the conditions under which the butter was

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produced. He did not altogether blame the Price Fixing Commissioner for what had been done, but he would not like to be in that gentleman's shoes for anything, because the most honest people in Queensland looked on him as something worse than a man. They believed him to be a tool of the party. It was not right for hon. members to get up and try to "down" a man, as the whole principle was wrong. In the very best of times a big percentage of the farmers did not make more than wages, yet hon. members on the Government side had treated the farmers as if they were snakes. Hon. members opposite had accused the farmers of all sorts of things.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: That is not true.

Mr. WARREN: It was perfectly true, and the Secretary for Agriculture was no better than anybody else. The fact was that dairying was no ordinary occupation, and when it was remembered that the dairy farmer had to undergo great trials and difficulties, it was up to the Government to treat those people generously. He (Mr. Warren) had a farm himself, but it was not a profitable concern. He was keeping the farm. Unless a man was on a very fair piece of land, he could not make a profit even now. The hon. member for Cooroora mentioned a late member of Parliament who was doing well. He was in one of the most favoured spots on the North Coast, and he had made the thing pay. He knew of other farmers who had made their farms pay right throughout the drought, but they were the exception rather than the rule, and if the Government were going to fix the price of butter, they would have to fix a price that would enable a man on the worst land to make a living. It was recognised that the present season was a regular harvest for the dairymen; but if they took the average returns they would find that the farmers did not earn as much as men working on the roads in Brisbane to-day. It was the duty of the Government to assist the farmer. They did not want to be spooned. They had never asked for such a thing, but they did ask to be treated as well as the farmer in New South Wales. The world's parity might be against them in a few months, and if it was, they could not blame the Government. With the exception of the Amazon brigade that Mr. Ferry had to assist him in coming to a decision, the workers were fair in the matter, and were willing to see that the farmer got a fair return. That was the only thing that was going to genuinely benefit the State. They were not asking for the Treasury, but they did want to make the dairying industry a permanent one, and instead of it going back 9,000 suppliers at any time, it ought to be gaining ground, as Queensland was in a better position than any country in the world to produce butter. The loss of stock during the last drought, even on the Blackall Range, was something enormous. One man lost seventy head in one night. Hon. members opposite grinned. They had not the ordinary feelings of humanity.

[Sitting suspended from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.]

Mr. WARREN (continuing): At the tea adjournment they were trying to show that the Government and the Price Fixing Commissioner were not the friends of the farmer. The Premier had interjected, "Was not the

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price of butter higher than ever before in Queensland." But simply because, under exceptional circumstances, they were getting more for their butter, was it any argument that they should be absolutely robbed of what was their just due. The only man who was benefiting was the man who was doing the whole of his own work, but how many men were there doing the work themselves and paying no wages. If the industry were run in a one-horse manner of that description it would fail. It was only by the enterprise and "go" of the big, strong men that the industry was kept going. Co-operation had put the industry in its present prosperous condition. The hon. member for Rosewood had talked about butter being 6d. a lb. at one time. It had been 4½d. per lb., and if they were depending on proprietary concerns to-day it would be much below what it was at present. They were not depending on proprietary concerns because they had in the dairying industry big, strong men who were fighting for co-operation and better distribution, which was going to benefit the worker. The subject must be faced as a very difficult problem which was only going to be solved for the benefit of both the grower and the consumer by co-operation and co-operative distribution, not by price fixing. He would like to ask the Premier if when the world's parity went down the Government were going to allow the price of butter to remain as it was? The Premier was only catering for the class who put him there. He would like to know was it the intention of the Government to allow that tribunal, instituted for political purposes, to become permanent. He thought it was a fair question. Butter was a most difficult thing to produce, and when a drought occurred the effects of it were felt long after the drought had passed away. The dairy farmer as an individual was a man deserving of the greatest assistance. They were not asking for help; they were simply asking to be left alone; and, if the world's parity did go down, they would not cry about it, but would simply fight on and do their best to produce sufficient butter to make the industry a paying proposition. If the Government were sincere—which they were not—there were many ways of helping the producer, but hon. members on the other side did not want to help him. They posed as the friend of the man on the land. His party was returned with a majority of electors because the people were disgusted with members on the other side of the House. They were sick of their tactics and robbery, and proved it by returning so many farmers' candidates and also by recording a majority of so many thousand votes in favour of the Opposition.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. WARREN: He was proving that the gentlemen who declared during this debate that they were the friends of the farmers were not their friends. To prove it conclusively there were only two members representing primary producers on the other side, and both of those hon. gentlemen were with his side to-night heart and soul, and if they had one spark of honour in them they would vote to put down a system which was not going to benefit the working man.

Mr. WEIR (Maryborough): He would fail in his duty if he did not speak a word or two in favour of the farmers in his electorate—that was, those farmers who farmed

in Kent street, Maryborough. He was not one of those who cried about the price the public had to pay for butter. If the farmer was entitled to more he should get more. He had no farmers' representatives in his electorate, and if he were selfish he would argue in favour of a minimum price for the man in the city, but members on his side stood for something bigger. They stood as the representatives of one class, namely the people who worked; they did not care whether they were farmers or anybody else. The logic of Labour said that a man was entitled to the full product of his labour and said to these people, "Go to the Arbitration Court and prove your case and get the full product of your labour." But they had failed dismally. He was surprised at the hon. member for Murrumbidgee, who usually took a decent view of all matters, allowing himself to be contaminated by the views of some people opposite to the extent of getting up and criticising Mr. Ferry because he happened to be the price fixer. All he could say was that the responsibility was on the heads of members opposite, and not on his side. He had argued some time ago with a Mr. Todd, a friend of members opposite and a very estimable gentleman, that if they knew their case and their case was justifiable—he did not know whether it was or not, he was not bothering his head about that—

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Oh! that is the trouble.

Mr. WEIR: Well, he did not know whether it cost 1s. 7d. or 2s. 7d. to produce a pound of butter, neither did anyone else on the floor of the House. The place to settle that argument was the Arbitration Court. As industrialists, they could not get a penny an hour increase unless they proved to the judge they were entitled to it. What right, then, had those people to take anything more out of the pockets unless they could prove their case? Members opposite went to the Arbitration Court and failed, and now they were squealing about it. Why did they not take their medicine like men? Members opposite could not make out a proper case on behalf of the dairymen, and that was the trouble. They could not discriminate between 1s. 7d. and 6s. when they were trying to arrive at the cost of producing a lb. of butter. Some of them said that it cost 6s. 9d. to produce a lb. of butter. They only had to listen to the diversity of opinion amongst hon. members opposite, to see how difficult it was for the Price Fixing Commissioner to arrive at the cost of producing a pound of butter on the evidence submitted. If the dairyman was entitled to more for producing his butter, he should get it. The dairyman was entitled to the full value of his commodity, but if he put his case in wrong hands, and a bad case was made out for him at the court, then it was no use blaming the Commissioner. The proper thing to do for members opposite was to go to the Arbitration Court, just the same as he (Mr. Weir) or any other unionist had to go when advocating better conditions for industrialists. The same machinery existed for both sides.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: We had an unsympathetic judge.

Mr. WEIR: What was the use of trying to argue with a man like the hon. member for Drayton, who put him in mind of a sewer rat. If they were going to allow the

Price Fixing Commissioner to do his duty, they must let him hear the evidence and give his decision, but if they were going to allow him to be skull-dragged all over the place by men like hon. members opposite, then his decisions would not be of any effect at all. Hon. members opposite mentioned the name of a man named Potts. He (Mr. Weir) did not know Mr. Potts at all. The only pots he was interested in were pots and pans. But someone suggested that Mr. Potts was to be victimised. Any suggestion of victimisation came not from this side but from the Opposition side, who certainly suggested victimisation of Mr. Ferry, the Price Fixing Commissioner. The hon. member opposite who was straightforward and honourable in his statement was the hon. member for Cooroora, who said frankly from his place in the House that if he had his way he would abolish price-fixing once and for all. (Hear, hear!) The hon. member for Port Curtis said, "Hear, hear!" It was just as well to know where hon. members opposite stood on this question, so that the people living in the cities could see who were in favour of price-fixing and who were not. The Labour party believed in price-fixing. They believed in the price of labour being fixed, and also the price of commodities being fixed. They were precisely the same thing. He noticed that a body called the Housewives' Association had put in an appearance at the court when the evidence was being taken. The women were there in the interests of their children, as they had a perfect right to be. Hon. members opposite objected to the women being there, because the women beat them. The women were there to see that hon. members opposite and their following did not take 1s. more out of the pockets of the people than they were entitled to. The hon. member for Burnett taxed the Government with being responsible for the presence of the women at the court. That was a contemptible lie, because the Government were not in any degree responsible for the attendance of those women. The women were there in the interests of their children. It was quite right that they should see that the dairymen got the price they were entitled to, and no more. They knew how for years they had to fight men like the hon. member for Port Curtis, and men of that ilk, trying to get an extra rate for the industrialists. Just in the same way the women had a right to be present at court when the case was argued about what it cost to produce a pound of butter from "Polly," "Roany," or "Strawberry." Members opposite talked about being against direct action, but now they were advocating it as against a decision by arbitration. If members opposite believed in direct action, well, let them go ahead. If they wanted to make trouble in the country, let them preach the doctrine of direct action. If they wanted to commit suicide, let them do away with price-fixing. It is a good thing for the people in the cities to know that members opposite did not believe in price-fixing. Hon. members opposite went to the Commissioner, and now they were not satisfied with his decision. The trouble was that they did not make out a good case, and the reflection was on themselves. No court could give an increase in the price of any commodity unless there was evidence to justify it. Mr. Ferry said that on the evidence he could not see that it cost more than 1s. 7d. per lb. to produce butter, although some members

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opposite went as high as 6s. 9d. in their claim. Fancy putting up a case like that! It showed a want of intelligence on the part of those who represented the dairymen. He quite admitted that the dairymen were entitled to some consideration. The women and children in dairying districts were entitled to some consideration, as well as the women and children in the cities. But the case was taken to the court at the wrong time. Everybody knew that the dairying districts had been going through a very bad time, but as soon as the good seasons came, and good prices were being received, an application was made to the court to fix the price of butter still higher. They based their claim for an increase on the fact that a drought existed six months ago. What the dairymen and their representatives should have done was to have fought the matter right through the drought. Did they do it? No. Their friend Mr. Hughes would not let them do it, and, like little dogs, they got behind when Mr. Hughes told them to get behind, and they ran under the house when he told them to run under the house. He would like to know if the members from sugar districts would use the same arguments in connection with sugar as they used that night. The trouble was that the case for the dairymen was in bad hands, and on the evidence the Price Fixing Commissioner allowed a margin of 3½ per cent. on the cost of producing the butter. The references made to Mr. Ferry that day were due to the fact that his decision did not suit hon. members opposite.

Mr. WALKER: He is carrying out the instructions of the Government.

Mr. WEIR: He could quite imagine the hon. member for Cooroora getting down to that level when he said that Mr. Ferry took his instructions from the Government. He (Mr. Weir) defied any member to prove that anyone on the Government side of the House, whether in the Cabinet or not, had anything to do with directing Mr. Ferry in his business. They knew quite well that the timber merchants threatened Mr. Ferry the other day, and told him they would go and see the Premier, and he told them to go to blazes. That showed that Mr. Ferry did not receive any instructions.

Mr. BRAND: Why was he appointed over the heads of others?

Mr. WEIR: The Cabinet, in their wisdom, knew that Mr. Ferry had a certain amount of intelligence. Members opposite believed in the old custom of seniority. They heard a lot about London parity that day, but he did not hear such a squeal for London parity when they were talking about the price of wheat the other day. They did not say anything about London parity when they were offered 8s. a bushel for their wheat. They were not asking for London parity for their cheese either. He (Mr. Weir) did not believe in London parity, and the Labour party did not believe in London parity. What did he care what Germany or Britain or Denmark or any other country got for its products? As an Australian citizen, he considered that the people engaged in Australian industries were entitled to the full cost of production on Australian conditions, and he hoped that all the talk about London parity would be chased well out of existence by Australian sentiment. The whole weakness of the case for the dairymen was that it was in the wrong hands in those

who took it to the court, and their advocacy ended in a beautiful failure. The trouble was that members opposite did not understand ordinary logic. They allowed a mob of housewives to go to the court and beat them, and now they are squealing. (Laughter). When they had members who could not put up a better case, and who could not tell them how much it cost to produce a pound of butter from "Blossom" or "Roany," or "Strawberry," the best thing the dairymen and men on the land could say was, "God protect us from the Primary Producers' Union."

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: (Hon. W. N. Gillies, *Eacham*): He rose to reply to some of the statements made by hon. members opposite. He gave way to no man in his sympathy for the bonâ fide farmer. (Hear, hear!) There was no need to emphasise that, because the Government had shown by their actions that

[7.30 p.m.] they were prepared to do, and had done, something for the bonâ fide farmers. He did not question the bonâ fides of some farmers' representatives on the other side, but the so-called Farmers' party was an impossible party, because a party of sufficient strength could not possibly be returned by the farmers of Queensland, for out of the whole population there were roughly 45,500 farmers, including wheat growers, dairy farmers, and sugar growers, and the rest, or about 10 per cent. of the voting strength of Queensland. That meant that the farmers of Queensland should return to the House about ten out of seventy-two, assuming that all the farmers voted for that party. That could not be accepted, for the reason also that he himself represented one of the most important farming constituencies in the State, and 500 persons more voted for him on the last occasion than on the previous occasion, and the bulk of them were farmers. It did not matter what the Farmers' party promised, the fact remained that without some form of coalition with the Labour party or the Tory party, they could never get a majority. He had no doubt that the hon. member for Cooroora, being a dairy farmer—a share farmer—would be quite agreeable to the people of Queensland paying 10s. or £1 per lb. for their butter, if he could get it; but this was impossible, first of all, because no Government would have the power to enforce it, and, secondly, because the consumers could never pay that price.

Hon. members had condemned price fixing in a very cowardly way. They would accept all the benefits which they and their supporters had received through it. The first notification by the Commissioner resulted in a saving of £80,000—£36,000 on groceries, £4,000 on meat and bread, £4,000 on condensed milk, £6,000 on drapery and boots, and £2,500 on fertilisers. Did hon. members object to Mr. Ferry's reducing the price of fertilisers and other things farmers had to buy? So far as he had been able to follow the debate, only one member on the other side had declared definitely against price fixing. There was some consistency about that. Personally, he had very little faith in it as a permanent effective measure in reducing prices, because it was economically unsound, but during the war and the aftermath of the war, Governments had been justified in resorting to it to prevent profiteering.

Mr. WALKER: Are the dairymen profiteers?

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The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Were the public servants or the workers profiteers? He did not say the farmers were getting too much for their butter, but the fact was that the price of butter was three times the price of pre-war days. Since the present Government have been in power, it had been increased by 180 per cent. Every possible opportunity, even to the extent of transgressing the Standing Orders, had been seized by hon. members opposite to condemn and criticize, and blackguard the Commissioner. Even while the question of butter was sub judice members on the other side criticised the manner in which the inquiry was carried out.

Mr. WALKER: It took him seven weeks to come to a decision.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: If he had come to a decision in seven minutes or seven hours that hon. member would have condemned him for rushing his decision. It was to his credit that the Commissioner sent out letters all over Queensland, and endeavoured to collect information concerning the whole State—and let hon. members bear in mind, that Wide Bay, or Cooroora was not Queensland, because he represented a more important agricultural district a thousand miles away from Brisbane.

Mr. WALKER: Information which he could have got from the factories in ten minutes.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: He found that a circular was sent to the hon. members' factory, but they did not avail themselves of the opportunity of replying. (Government laughter.) They endeavoured to get those farmers who were hit worst by the drought, and were in the worst economic position to make a success of dairying to place their case before the Commissioner. In his own district, farmers were doing very well—they did not cry "stinking fish." He was not saying they were getting too much, nor did he say they should not get London parity, but that was not the question before the Commissioner. The dairy farmers asked him to give them an opportunity of showing that they were not receiving the cost of production, and the Commissioner said they had not made out a case. He held that even the statements of members opposite had indicated that in their opinion the farmers were now getting a fair price. What they said was that the Commissioner should have taken into consideration the inadequate payments to the farmers in bad old Tory days, and allow the farmers to get a higher price to make that loss good. The dairy farmers went before the Commissioner at a time when the price of butter was the highest in the history of Queensland, and the season was probably one of the best. There may come a time when London parity will not be a paying price.

Hon. W. H. BARNES: Was not the chief plank of your party that you went into power to reduce the price of food?

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The hon. member who interjected belonged to a party whose organ—the Brisbane "Courier"—came out on the day before the election, in order that it might reach city consumers whom he represented—of course he had no time for sympathy with farmers—but not the farmers on the Downs, with a cartoon—and it was said a cartoon spoke louder than words just as a moving picture

had a greater effect on some minds than a lecture—showing the size of a piece of butter that could be bought at that time under Labour Government as being about one third the size that of the piece that could be bought for the same price in the days of Toryism, and the respective sizes of a loaf of bread and a quantity of jam. The only inference that could be drawn from that was that the farmers were getting too much for their butter, wheat, or fruit, or that wages were too low. (Hear, hear!) Which did the hon. member say was the case? He could exhibit the cartoon to the House. He was sorry he could not get it into "Hansard," so that the farmers could see it. The loaf of bread in 1915 was about four times the size of the loaf of bread in 1920, the pat of butter was just about five times the size, and the tin of jam just about the same. There was the housewife with the grocer's bill in her hand, and underneath the "Courier" wrote, "She sees through the bluff now." (Government laughter.) It was well known that the farmers on the Darling Downs would not read the "Courier" till after the election day, and would not be affected, and the cartoon was circulated in order to make the people of Brisbane believe that the Labour party were giving the farmer too much and were robbing the city worker. The Labour party were out to do a fair thing by the farmer, who deserved the full results of his labour and who for the first time in the history of Queensland was getting a fair deal. Now, how did the Federal Government treat them? He endorsed the statement made by Mr. Beale, Mr. Lasseter, and Mr. Catts, M.H.R., that through the win-the-war Government the Australian producers had been deliberately slaughtered on the altar of Imperialism by Mr. Hughes in the interests of the Imperial Government and the people of Great Britain to the extent of more than sufficient to pay the war debt of Australia. He had figures to show that the butter producer was underpaid for four years whilst the Federal Government controlled the price, which in those days was not comparable with the price now paid by the Labour Government in Queensland, and yet there was not one word of protest by the Farmers' party on the other side. But immediately the Labour party had control they demanded that the people of Queensland make good all those losses.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I say you are deliberately misleading this House.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. member for Drayton to withdraw that remark.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Out of consideration for you, Mr. Smith, I withdraw, but it is a fact all the same. (Laughter and uproar.)

The CHAIRMAN: The statement that any member is deliberately misleading the House is unparliamentary and the hon. member must withdraw.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I certainly withdraw "misleading."

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member must withdraw unreservedly.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: I withdraw "deliberately misleading" but the farmers sold their own butter and the Minister knows it. (Hear, hear!)

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: He would be very glad to get into "Hansard!"

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a table giving official information, compiled by the dairy expert of his department. The table shows that the Commonwealth Government took control of butter and cheese on 21st September, 1916. The price of butter at that time was 149s. 4d., that was for butter consumed in Australia. On seven or eight different occasions he found that the price paid by the Australian consumer of butter was somewhat in excess of London parity. Of course, as I have said, the London price was too low in these days. At this time a contract was entered into and the surplus butter was exported to the old country at 150s. f.o.b. for butter graded at 30 points. The table was interesting, as it gave the figures from the date he had mentioned until 27th May this year, when the price was 228s. 8d. to the Australian consumer of butter and the exportable butter was 175s. As the table was interesting and informative, he would be glad if the Committee would allow it to be printed in "Hansard" in full.

Hon. W. H. BARNES: We want the figures, so that we can discuss them. You should not ask us to do that.

THE SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: The table gave the prices for Australian consumption for the four years—Federal control—21st September, 1916, till 27th August, 1920, when the Federal Government released control.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is it the will of the Committee that the table referred to by the Secretary for Agriculture be inserted in "Hansard"?

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: "Aye."

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: "No."

THE CHAIRMAN: Question resolved in the affirmative.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Divide.

THE SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: There was no necessity to take a division, as he would take another opportunity of getting the figures inserted in "Hansard." When hon. members opposite refused to have the figures inserted in "Hansard," it only showed how much afraid those gentlemen were of the facts. On 1st August, 1920, the Federal Government relinquished control of price-fixation of butter, and the State Government resumed control of price-fixing, and on 14th August, 1920, the price of butter was fixed at 238s. per cwt., an increase of 1d. per lb. under the Profiteering Prevention Act of 1920, and the price last mentioned still maintained. In order to show the inconsistency of hon. members opposite, he would quote from the minutes of a deputation which waited on him on 15th June of this year when he was Acting Chief Secretary. The deputation consisted of Messrs. H. M. Hart, J. Purcell, W. T. Harris, E. Turrell, and W. Purcell. Mr. J. Purcell, in the course of his remarks—

"Thanked the Minister for what had been done up to the present, although, perhaps, it was not quite all they had expected, but it had relieved the situation very considerably. Conditions were enormously better than when they last saw Mr. Gillies, and all the wheat planted before the rain had come up beautifully.

"Mr. Gillies expressed his pleasure at this.

"Mr. Purcell said they thought the Government should help now, for when the crop matured they would be repaid

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for the risk they are taking and the seed wheat they were supplying the people with."

That was on the question of wheat. Further on a reference was made to butter, when a very important statement was made by Mr. Purcell. He did not think anyone in the House would question the bona fides of Mr. Purcell to speak on behalf of the dairy farmers, because that gentleman held a very important position on the wheat pool which he would not hold if he were not qualified for the position. The report continued—

"Mr. Purcell informed the Minister as to their trip to Melbourne with regard to price-fixing. The result of their stating of the case was that they were informed the Federal Government would shortly abolish price-fixing altogether. With the shortage in New South Wales and Victoria, this would give the Queensland manufacturers the opportunity of getting a better price. The Federal people thought that while they had 50,000 boxes of butter in cold store, they had better not abolish price-fixing.

"The deputation thought that perhaps in another week or two they would get another 1½d. in Queensland, the price to be equalised all over Australia by the profit on the butter in cold stores.

"Mr. Gillies mentioned that he had followed the matter in the Press.

"Mr. W. Purcell asked whether the Queensland Government would take a hold of the price-fixing in butter and cheese.

"Mr. Gillies replied that he could not tell them.

"Mr. W. Purcell hoped, if they did do so, they would first call evidence as to the cost of production before reducing the price."

Mr. Purcell, speaking for the dairy farmers of Queensland, expressed the hope that if the Queensland Government did take over the price-fixing of butter, that before reducing the price they would call evidence as to the cost of production. Speaking on behalf of the Government as Acting Premier, he (Mr. Gillies) made this reply—

"The Price Fixing Commissioner would get his instructions to make the fullest inquiry into the cost of production before any reduction to the producer took place.

"Mr. Hart thanked Mr. Gillies for the assurance, which was a big thing to take back to their people.

"Mr. J. Purcell said they told the Commonwealth people their price-fixing was the biggest mix-up in the world."

What did he do? How did he honour that compact? As soon as ever the Federal Government released the control of butter he looked into the matter. The first time for four years that the Queensland Government had any power to do anything to assist the farmers, what did they do?

An **OPPOSITION MEMBER:** Reduce the price.

THE SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: No; they increased the price. As Minister for Agriculture, he pointed out to Mr. Ferry that he found that the Win-the-war-National Government, which had so much sympathy for the farmer, were giving the grocer, who took no risks of bad seasons, and who took no risks with regard to bad debts, the enormous

sum of 4d. per lb. for selling butter over the counter for cash. He pointed out to Mr. Ferry that the farmer was entitled to the full result of his labour, and said it would be a fair thing for Mr. Ferry to look closely into the matter and find out if it would not be a reasonable thing to take 1d. per lb. off the grocer and give it to the farmer. That was what Mr. Ferry did, and not one member on the Opposition side had been man enough or fair enough to give him credit for doing that. The Government were told that they had no sympathy for the farmer. But the figures he had quoted proved conclusively that the Government took every opportunity to do the right thing when they had the power to do something for the farmer. He wanted to give some more figures, and he supposed hon. members opposite would prevent them going into "Hansard," too. The statement was prepared by his department, and he was satisfied that the figures were correct. It was as follows:—

"Return showing the amount of butter manufactured for the years indicated below, together with the particulars as to the average price paid to Queensland dairymen by factories, together with the total annual value of the product.

Year.	Butter Manufactured.	Value (Wholesale).	Average price per lb for Butter ex Dairymen.	
			£	s. d.
1896*	6,164,240	154,106	0	6
1906	22,746,593	971,513	0	8½
1907	22,789,158	973,287	0	8½
1908	23,838,357	1,107,490	0	9½
1909	24,592,711	1,050,314	0	8½
1910	31,258,333	1,400,113	0	9
1911	27,858,536	1,224,615	0	8½
1912	28,184,832	1,368,139	0	9½
1913	33,122,143	1,621,602	0	10½
1914	37,230,240	1,900,293	0	10
1915	25,456,714	1,560,359	1	2
1916	28,967,279	2,051,848	1	3½
1917	38,930,690	2,818,419	1	3½
1918	32,371,575	2,765,071	1	5½
1919	25,500,000	2,071,875	1	5½
1920	Incomplete.	Incomplete.	2	0
To-day	2	2½

* In that year Queensland imported 1,001,424 lb., value £42,995.

At the present time the average price paid in Queensland was about 2s. 2½d. That was the highest price ever paid during the history of the co-operative movement in Queensland, which was about twenty-five years old. He had quoted the prices for the last twenty-four years, and he had given the Committee an indication of what price the farmer received for his butter from the various factories, ranging from 6d. per lb. in 1896 up to 2s. 2½d. at the present time; and for the benefit of the hon. member for Coorooora he would quote a telegram from Gympie which appeared in the "Courier" of 2nd of this month which showed the prices paid by the factories in his district. The telegram read as follows:—

"DAIRY COMPANIES.

"Gympie, 22nd November.

"The following were the monthly pays of the co-operative companies operating in the coastal belt:—Caboolture Co.

(Caboolture, Pomona, and Eumundi factories), 2s. 3d.; Kin Kin, 2s. 3d.; Wide Bay (Gympie and Cooroo), 2s. 2½d.; South Burnett (Murgon), 2s. 2d.; Maryborough and branches, 2s. 2d."

Since the Labour party came into power the price of butter had increased by 180 per cent.

The bell indicated that the hon. member's time allowed by the Standing Orders had expired.

Mr. TAYLOR (*Windor*): In order to enable hon. members to form a correct idea of the figures quoted by the Secretary for Agriculture, it would have been fair on the part of that hon. member to have supplied the Committee with the number of factories, the number of dairy farmers, and the conditions associated with the industry in 1896 as compared with the present time. In 1896, if his memory was at all right, the dairying industry was only in its infancy. He did not suppose that throughout the whole of Queensland there were half a dozen factories in existence at that time, and Queensland was dependent largely for its supplies of butter and cheese on the Southern States of Australia and New Zealand, so that the figures quoted by the hon. gentleman were practically valueless. As a permanent measure, he thought price-fixing was an absolute failure, and the sooner the abolition of price-fixing took place the better it would be for Queensland. What did the figures quoted by the Minister, as to the increasing price of butter, prove? They certainly proved one thing—that the cost of living in that direction was steadily rising and that the condition of the people was no better. Personally, he would not make any attack on the Price Fixing Commissioner. He would not like that gentleman's job, as he had got an absolutely impossible task to perform. In the matter of fixing the price of butter, no doubt that gentleman had done his best, but he had certainly adopted an absolutely wrong method of getting the evidence. If the Price Fixing Commissioner had arranged with some of the dairy farmers to take over a dairy farm that was milking forty or fifty cows for three months or six months, and worked it absolutely under his own supervision, then he would have absolutely found out to his own satisfaction and to the satisfaction of everyone else what it did cost to produce butter.

With regard to ascertaining the price of butter, they might send out inquiries to from forty to one hundred farmers in various districts. One man's land had, perhaps, cost him £3 or £4 an acre, while another man's land had cost him £20 or £30

[8 p.m.] an acre. One man might be 2 or 3 miles from a railway station, while another might be 10, 15, or 20 miles from a station. There was quite a number of factories which contributed towards making the cost of butter on one farm or in one district very different from what it would cost on another farm or in another district. To establish an estimate of what would really be the actual cost of production would be a most difficult matter. If there were an outside market for a farmer's butter at 270s. per cwt., he would absolutely be entitled to that amount, and if the outside markets were only 150s., he would have to accept it. The subject of sugar had been introduced into the discussion. If a

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Government, by its legislation in connection with any particular industry, fostered and encouraged that industry at the expense of the whole of the people of the State, then that Government had a right to say to that industry, "We have done this in order to foster and protect your industry, we ask in return that there shall be some measure of protection given to the people of the State for the protection which you have received." Legislation had been introduced into the country to do away with black labour, and in many other directions to encourage the industry throughout the Northern part of New South Wales and the whole of Queensland. Therefore, in the matter of price fixing for that industry the Government were quite entitled to ask that certain things should be done in the interests of the whole of the community for the benefits which that industry had received. But with regard to butter nothing of that kind had been done so far as the Government were concerned, and the fact that butter was dearer to-day than eight or ten years ago was not due to the Government. One or two members had stated that if they wished the dairying industry to be continued they would have to do everything possible to encourage and foster it. He would refer hon. members to page 10 of the Agricultural Department's report for the year 1919-1920, which stated that "in two years the rural community, as applied to farming and dairying, is less by 8,600 people." That was a very serious state of affairs. If, as had been stated by some members, dairying was such a money-making proposition, how was it that so many persons had found out that the best thing they could do was to get out and try some other means of making a livelihood. What was really necessary was a better organised system of distribution, and a better organised system with regard to glut crops. There was nothing more disheartening to a man than to find that after six, nine, or twelve months' work, he was compelled to sell the goods he had produced at a lesser cost than it had taken to produce them, and yet that was happening to-day in Queensland. What was the reason that potatoes were selling in Brisbane to-day at from £5 to £6 a ton, when eight or ten weeks ago they were £15 or £16 a ton, and onions were selling to-day at £7 or £8 a ton which a few weeks ago were £30 a ton. Under normal conditions prices would regulate and fix themselves without any Price Fixing Commissioner at all, (Hear, hear!) The sooner they got back to the old order of things the better. Hon. members opposite knew perfectly well—they had said in the Chamber time and again—that the cost of living at the present day was just about twice what it was about eight or ten years ago. Could it be honestly and truthfully said that all the methods they had been adopting during recent years to better conditions had accomplished their object? The evidence was all the other way. They had no evidence that this price-fixing humbug had worked out in the interests of the community. With regard to the dairy farmer generally, he would say that if the taxable income of a man in the city was £500 per annum and the taxable income of a dairy farmer was £500 per annum, the dairy farmer was of infinitely more value to the community than the man in the city with a similar income, and he was entitled to some consideration. The dairyman went to his

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work when most of them were in bed, he had to fight bush fires and other evils, and yet some people begrudged him a fair return for his labour. The farmer was fully entitled to a full return for his labour. If the huge amount of unpaid labour on dairy farms was paid at city rates of wages, and they worked city hours, instead of butter being 2s. 6d. per lb, it would be 4s. or 5s. per lb. He hoped it would not be long before the Government would see the absolute necessity for doing away with this price-fixing business altogether, and as it had not worked out in the best interests of the community. He had nothing whatever to say against those who had been endeavouring to carry out the work of price fixing. With regard to the report which had been read out by the hon. member for Burnett that afternoon, and which was issued by the Price Commissioner just prior to the election, he did not think the Price Commissioner had anything more to do with the publication of that report than he had. He believed that anyone who read that report would find that the Premier had asked for it and then used it for a political stunt.

Mr. COLLINS (*Bowen*): He had listened very carefully to the debate on the Commissioner for Price Fixing, and from it he would imagine that the Commissioner of Prices had been appointed to deal only with one commodity—butter. Hon. members opposite should realise that there were 725,000 people in Queensland, and that they were not all engaged in the occupation of dairying. Those members on that side of the House who represented sugar centres could not really oppose the appointment of a Commissioner for fixing prices, because the sugar industry would have been in a very poor position if it had not been for fixing the price of sugar.

Mr. FLETCHER: The farmers are represented on the price-fixing tribunal.

Mr. COLLINS: Yes, thanks to the present Government. The party with which he was connected had for a long time been preaching the doctrine that the value of a commodity was the amount of labour employed in the production of that commodity on the law of averages. That was a sound doctrine, and he was very pleased to think that the propaganda work by members of his side amongst the farmers of Queensland had made some progress in that direction, and that he should live to see the day when members representing the farming interests expressed the belief that the product of the labourer should belong to the labourer. Members on that side of the House had never said at any time that people should not be paid for their labour in connection with anything which was produced from the land. They had been trying to hammer into the dull heads of a lot of people of Queensland, including the portion of the people who called themselves farmers, that they should get paid for their labour, but it had taken a long time to convince them of the fairness of that doctrine. Members on that side were not getting away from that doctrine, but members opposite were gradually coming to accept that doctrine—to accept the teaching of socialism. The Price Commissioner had to deal with many things beside butter. Farmers in his electorate did not ask that the price of butter

should be fixed by the Commissioner; but they asked that the price of fertilisers should be fixed, because they knew that the people who controlled fertilisers were charging too much for those commodities. Mr. Kent, who was secretary of the Bowen Farmers' Association, and who was not a supporter of his, wrote to him asking him to place before the Price Commissioner a request from the farmers that he should fix the price of fertilisers. That request did not show that farmers generally agreed with the idea of the hon. member for Cooroora, when he said that if he had his way he would wipe out the Price Commissioner altogether. They had now debated for three hours the question of fixing the price of butter, and he wished that hon. members would get away from that question. He was one of those who believed that the fixation of prices was going to remain. If it was found necessary during the war by a Conservative Government of Great Britain, made up practically of blue-blooded Tories, to resort to price-fixing to prevent their own friends from exploiting the public, then he saw no reason why they should not have price-fixation in Queensland.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Because you make politics out of it.

Mr. COLLINS: They did nothing of the kind. He did not think that Mr. Ferry was a man who would be pulled hither and thither by the politician. He took it that Mr. Ferry was appointed to the position on account of his ability. He (Mr. Collins) had never met him until he saw him in the Brisbane office.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Did he not make up a report for the Premier at the election time?
The PREMIER: No.

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

Mr. POLLOCK took the chair.

Mr. COLLINS (continuing): He had discussed matters with the Price Commissioner, as the representative of his constituents, some of whom wrote down asking that the price of fertilisers should be fixed. He had handed their letter to the Price Commissioner. The continually throwing out, as the hon. member for Murrumba did this afternoon, that people outside looked upon Mr. Ferry as less than a man, he did not believe in at all. Mr. Ferry was respected by the farmers in his electorate for fixing the price of fertilisers. Where would they be in connection with the sugar industry if there had been no fixation of prices? He was satisfied that the Commissioner was doing good work. They should take a broad view of things and not talk about nothing else than butter. There were other things besides butter. He had hardly heard cheese mentioned. Had not the farmers benefited by the fixation of prices?

Mr. MORGAN: Not in any way.

Mr. COLLINS: Did the farmer consume no groceries? The Southern farmers might be able to live on the air, but the Northern farmers needed meat and drink. They did not complain as much as the Southern farmers did. The hon. member for Drayton, who represented 525 square miles, equal to 525 blocks of 640 acres each, talked as if he was the only authority on butter. If the whole of that area was under cultivation, it would not be much. The hon. member for

Murrumba, who represented about 1,070 square miles, talked as if he was the only man who had any farmers in his electorate. He (Mr. Collins) was prepared to say that there were more farmers in his electorate than in that of the hon. member for Drayton. Government members were just as much interested in looking after the farmers as hon. members opposite. They were interested in seeing that the Price Fixing Commissioner did a fair thing, not only to the farmers, but to the public in general. There had been prosecutions in his electorate in connection with the price of sugar and other commodities. There were exploiters everywhere, who utterly disregarded the law and ignored the prices which were fixed, and they had to pay the penalty. The hon. member for Drayton said that he would do away with the Price Fixing Commissioner, and that the farmers had a right to charge what they thought fit for any commodity, but the farmers were only entitled to a fair and not an extortionate profit. Hon. members opposite did not represent all the farmers in Queensland, and the farmers were perfectly satisfied with the Price Fixing Commissioner.

Mr. J. H. C. ROBERTS (*Pittsworth*): He desired to point out that the decision of the Price Fixing Commissioner in refusing to give to the butter producers of Queensland the increase they asked for was not based on the evidence adduced before him. There was something greater than merely what it cost to produce a pound of butter. In looking into questions that were sent out to the farmers to answer, he found that they went back for some considerable period. Many of the farmers were not in the habit of keeping their books in such a way as to enable them to refer back to a period of four or five years ago. The Price Fixing Commissioner should have got further evidence before coming to his decision. He had not yet seen in Queensland or Australia as a whole, any body of men refused a living wage, but the dairy farmers had been distinctly imposed upon by the Price Fixing Commissioner. The dairy farmers were entitled to the rise they asked for, first of all, because the farmers in New South Wales had got the rise. At the same time, the Government were everlastingly saying that they were the friends of the small producers. Secondly, hon. members opposite said that the butter producers never received a price equal to what they were receiving to-day. Let me admit that the farmers were receiving what, in the opinion of those ladies who appeared at the conference, and who said that the farmers were not giving the evidence which was required, was a better price than what they had ever had before. They should have gone back a little further and compared the prices they were getting to-day with those ruling in 1914. The Secretary for Agriculture had read a statement to the Committee, in which he said that the price of butter in 1914 was somewhere in the vicinity of 1s. 3½d. to 1s. 4d. a lb. The hon. member for Toowoomba mentioned that, in that year, the price of butter had been somewhere in the vicinity of 10d. a lb. He did not wish to disbelieve either the Minister or the hon. member for Toowoomba, but he found great difficulty in arriving at a reasonable understanding when those hon. members gave such entirely different statements. The Price Fixing Commis-

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sioner should have gone a little further, and should have realised that 1914 and 1920 were two different periods altogether. The question of the upkeep of the improvements on the farms should have received consideration.

[8.30 p.m.]

In the year 1914 wire netting could be purchased for £27 10s. per ton and in June, 1920, it cost £30 16s. per ton. That was a very considerable increase, much bigger than the increase the producers were getting for their butter to-day. In 1914 barbed wire—which played an essential part in the improvements on a dairy farm—could be purchased for £14 10s. per ton for No. 12 gauge; to-day the price was £68 15s. on rails in Brisbane. He hazarded the opinion that that was a bigger increase than the increase the dairyman got for his butter. Plain wire, No. 8, could be bought in 1914 for £7 17s. 6d.; to-day it cost £31 10s. per ton. No. 10 plain black wire cost £8 2s. 6d. in 1914 as against £33 15s. to-day. No. 8 plain galvanised wire in 1914 cost £9 5s. per ton as against £60 to-day. In the face of these figures, he asked hon. gentlemen opposite to say if the dairy farmer was not entitled to an increase in the price for his butter? When the Price Commissioner gave his decision, he gave it against the weight of evidence. They knew that the price of timber had increased fully 50 to 75 per cent., and that had a great bearing on the work that had to be carried out on a dairy farm. Then again, the increased rate of interest affected the dairy farmers and added to the cost of production. In 1914 the rate of interest was 6½ per cent.; to-day the farmers were asked to pay 8 per cent. and in some cases 8½ per cent. for their money. That had a very big bearing in regard to fixing the price of butter. In New South Wales the dairymen were getting a bigger price than was paid to the Queensland dairy farmer. In addition to that, the land taxation was less in New South Wales. If they took the unimproved value of a farm worth £6,000 to £7,000, they would find that in New South Wales the land taxation was one-third less than it was in Queensland. If, therefore, he admitted that the Government were out to assist the dairy farmers, he would be doing something that bordered on the absurd. They should also consider that fully 95 per cent. of the cheese produced in Queensland was manufactured by co-operative companies, in all of which the dairy farmers were shareholders. Then again, salt in 1914 was only £4 10s. per ton, as against £9 to-day, an increase of 100 per cent. In 1914 rennet cost 9s. per gallon, as against £2 15s. to-day. Then with regard to cheese bandages in 1914, the cost was 5½d. per yard, as against 1s. 9d. to-day. That was a very big increase, much bigger than the increased price of butter or cheese. In regard to the medium cheeses, the price for bandages in 1914 was 6d., as against 1s. 6d. to-day. With regard to tops the cost was 8s. 6d. per thousand in 1914, as against £1 15s. to-day. While for medium it was £1 7s. per thousand in 1914, as against £4 10s. to-day. When they considered the cost of all these items, they would see that the Commissioner did not come to a fair decision in fixing the price of butter. As a man and a farmer he (Mr. Roberts) believed in a fair thing to all sections of the community. That was more than he could say

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about hon. members opposite, who believed that the farmer should supply foodstuffs to the cities at a price considerably less than the true market value. Was it fair and reasonable that a thing like that should exist in Queensland? The prosperity of the country depended upon its agriculture and primary production. One could not believe that the Government were serious in their desire to assist the man on the land when they noticed the Price Fixing Commissioner refused to give them a living wage. He heard the hon. member for Cooroora state that the biggest cheque paid by the Gympie factory was £140. They knew that the dairy farmer had had four years of hard work. A good many lost their stock and had many adverse conditions to contend with. During that period the dairymen and their wives and children had to toil early and late trying to "make ends meet." Many of the dairy farmers would have been down and out during the long years of drought if it had not been for the fact that their wives were "Britons" and stuck to their long hours of toil all through.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. J. H. C. ROBERTS: These women in the country were denied many of the luxuries that fell to the lot of the women in the large centres of population, so why should they be made to produce foodstuffs at a low price for the benefit of the men and women living in the cities earning up to £10,000 a year? When they were called upon to supply their foodstuffs at a low rate, it was absolutely wrong. It showed that the Price Fixing Commissioner was not au fait with all the facts. A suggestion thrown out by a member of the Opposition was a good one. He (Mr. Roberts) hoped he would live to see the day when the Price Fixing Commissioner would be toiling on a dairy farm. (Hear, hear!) He sincerely trusted that some hon. members opposite would also have to work on a dairy farm. (Hear, hear!) Then they would see what their friend the Price Fixing Commissioner thought ought to be the price of butter. (Government interruption.) In regard to the utensils required in the dairying industry, he would point out that in 1914 milk vats of 600 gallons, which were necessary for their dairy factories, cost £40, and in 1920 they cost £52. Milk cans of 10 gallon capacity in 1914 cost £1 8s., as against £2 7s. 6d. in 1920. Separators—and they were necessary on a dairy farm—of 65-gallon capacity in 1914 cost £30, and in 1920 cost £42. An 88-gallon separator in 1914 cost £33, as against £52 10s. in 1920. Those figures proved the increased cost of keeping a dairy farm up to working pitch. He believed it would break the heart of even the Minister for Agriculture were he to go to some of the farms and see the sliprails that were used instead of gates. He did not think the hon. gentleman wanted that sort of thing. Nor did he think the Price Fixing Commissioner considered it desirable that the house should be propped up with a prop stick on the west side in case the east wind should blow it over. Still, he did not seem to have the desire to give them a modicum of fair play. They had had a very considerable increase in railway freights. Had the Commissioner gone to a little trouble he might have ascertained also that pilfering had increased by 150 per cent. from 1914 to 1920.

Many of their cheeses disappeared on the way down. Recently, two trucks of cheese were sent from a centre on the Downs to the cool stores at Buruda. They left the starting point on a Tuesday. One truck got down on the following Wednesday afternoon. It was unloaded and graded on the Thursday morning. In that truck were 227 cheeses, every one of which was first class. The second truck did not arrive until Friday afternoon, when it was graded. Out of that, twenty cheeses were graded as third class, fifty odd were graded as second, and the balance was graded as first class. Those were some of the things they had to put up with in the dairying industry. He would like to tell them a little story to show the ideas of many men on the land. At the end of 1919 he was speaking to a dairy farmer. His father had been a farmer before him, and his great grandfather had been a farmer. That was a pedigree any man on the other side of the House ought to be proud to own. That man told him, "I am getting out of the farming game." He said, "Why are you doing that?" The farmer told him that a son of his, twenty-two years of age, was working in the railway yards at Toowoomba, and for the month of November got somewhere in the vicinity of £24. The father, with the assistance of two daughters and a son, milked forty-seven or forty-eight cows. The cheque they got for the month of October from the cheese factory amounted to £7, and he had had to spend £39 in buying fodder for his dairy herd.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! Will the hon. gentleman connect his remarks with the vote?

Mr. J. H. C. ROBERTS: It was all right for the Government to say they had a right to ask the Commissioner to fix prices. Could the Commissioner fix the price of rice, sago, tapioca, and many other commodities which were just as essential foodstuffs for the people as were butter and cheese? He could not do it. Who produced the greater quantity of the rice, sago, tapioca, and other things? The yellow races of the East. Yet the white producers of Queensland were to be imposed upon by the Commissioner. Did he fix the price of petrol? When he tried to do so, a boat loaded with petrol was lying in the river. As soon as he said he would not give the increase, the boat left for Sydney, and within twenty-four hours the increase was given. It showed the absolute futility and absurdity of the nonsensical idea that emanated from members on the other side of the House when they said it was the right thing to fix the price of a commodity produced in Queensland, when they were unable to fix the price of commodities which came from countries that employed cheap labour. They were not only sacrificing the dairy farmer, but they were asking his machinery and his cows to work a certain number of hours every day for nothing. Hon. members opposite seemed to think it a right and proper thing to impose upon the man who produced the foodstuffs of this State.

Mr. FOLEY (*Leichhardt*): He rose mainly to enter a protest against the abuse by the Opposition of a public servant, who had been employed by the Government to administer an Act which was passed by Parliament, and who had to confine his administration to that Act. The remarks of hon. members in reference to the Commissioner

being influenced by the Premier would, he thought, carry no weight with the farmers or any member of the House, but it pointed to what they might expect if the Opposition got on the Government side in forcing public servants to submit to their wishes. Mr. Ferry ought to be proud of the fact that he had not heard of one instance in which the consuming public had entered a protest against his prices. (Opposition laughter.) They had not heard one member of the Opposition, who represented consumers as well as producers, make such a protest. That was because the consumers were being protected. He thought the member for Bowen struck the right note when he touched upon the question of how the value of a commodity was created. The value of the commodity, which the great mass of the people of the State possessed, was fixed by an Arbitration Court, before which the worker had to produce evidence that his commodity—his labour power—was up to the value he claimed for it, and the Profiteering Prevention Act was really doing the same thing for other commodities. The debate had centred round butter, just as if butter were the only thing produced in the State by the farmer, or used by him. Mr. Ferry has fixed the prices of fertilisers. Petrol and kerosene had been dealt with or were being dealt with. (Opposition laughter.) If the prices had not been reduced or fixed, steps had been taken to prevent increases. Bread and meat, groceries, and fuel had also been dealt with. These facts had operated in favour of the farmer as well as other consumers, because he got them at reasonable prices, whereas if traders were unrestrained, he would have to pay through the nose for them. He had read in the Press how Mr. Ferry went to the trouble to send circulars to farmers in different parts of the State, with the result that practically only a handful of small struggling farmers who were working with old obsolete methods responded. They found no successful farmers coming along and showing how a farm could be run, if worked in a scientific manner. Mr. Ferry said that he had evidence that butter could be produced at the price fixed if farming were carried on in an up-to-date or scientific manner.

Mr. PETERSON interjected.

Mr. FOLEY: The interjector, like the Opposition, made unfair comparisons in order to try to show that Mr. Ferry had been unfair. He quoted *Gindie*, in the *Leichhardt* electorate, where he thought there were more cattle of the other sex than cows, and where he said butter cost more to produce than the fixed price. But even at *Gindie* they had other side lines, and the same thing applied to farmers, who ran pigs, poultry, etc., besides milking a few cows. In fact, that was one of the reasons why their cream cheques were so small.

Price fixing had been applied in other parts of the world, and he had a quotation from the "Scareblight" magazine in which Mr. Basil Manley wrote an article to show how unrestricted trade had acted on the community in America. During 1916-1917, the steel corporations acquired 177,000,000 dollars, or more than 4,000,000 dollars in excess of the entire capital stock. The clothing and dry goods stores made profits as high as 9,825 per cent., the meat packers profits ranging up to 4,244 per cent., the fruit and vegetable canners up to 2,032 per

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cent., and the woollen mills 1,772 per cent. Those were instances how the public could be exploited by unscrupulous traders, and the same thing would apply and applied, in many instances, in Australia.

According to the latest bulletin sent out by Mr. Knibbs, the cost of living in Queensland was much lower than in any other State. That, at least, was some credit to Mr. Ferry. For groceries and other goods which cost £1 in 1911, in the last month of the last recorded quarter of 1920 they cost £2 2s. 1d. in Brisbane, £2 5s. 9d. in Melbourne, £2 6s. in Sydney, and amounts in similar proportion in the other capitals, pointing conclusively to the effectiveness of the Act in reducing the cost of living in Queensland. One result of the working of the measure was that they would have fewer industrial disputes. Hon. members knew that if the cost of living was allowed to increase without restriction the first law of nature compelled the workers to go before the Arbitration Court, in order to keep their living up to a fair standard; and the judge must either give them an increase, or they went out on to the industrial field and caused trouble. Queensland stood very favourably on the list in connection with industrial disputes. The number of working days lost in New South Wales in 1919 was 3,000,000 odd, and the estimated loss in wages was £2,000,000. In Victoria there were 733,000 working days lost, and the estimated loss in wages was £392,000. In Queensland there were only 586,000 working days lost, and the estimated loss in wages was £327,000. The Government, therefore, had been justified in introducing the Act providing for the fixation of prices, and they could take credit to themselves for appointing such a man as Mr. Ferry to administer that Act. Mr. Ferry ought to be proud of the abuse levelled at him by hon. members opposite. In every magazine that came from America they saw letters with regard to the formation of Communist organisations which indicated the effect of the damnable system of exploitation that was carried on in that country. The same thing would apply to Queensland, if the Price Fixing Act had not been passed. In France, while the war was on, the Government had to take steps to protect the community against exploitation by the patriots, and in that connection he would like to read a quotation from "Stead's Magazine" on French rents. The article said—

"Heavy penalties are provided by the new French laws with the object of preventing speculation in house rents."

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. FOLEY: He was sorry if he were out of order, but he was a new chum to the Chamber and was not quite conversant with the rules of the House. He had proved to the public what they could expect if ever the Opposition got on that side of the House, and also what the public servants could expect.

Mr. CATTERMULL (*Musgrave*): He was very sorry that the Price Fixing Commissioner had not seen his way clear to give the dairy farmers 25s. per cwt. for their butter as asked by them, as the evidence at the inquiry proved that that price was necessary in order to enable the farmer to make a living. It was not a fair thing that farmers on the other side of an imaginary line should be getting 36s. per cwt. more for their butter than were the farmers of

Queensland. The cost of production during the last five or six years had been very high, and the price now asked by the dairy farmers would not compensate them for their losses during the last few years. Hon. members opposite had ridiculed the statement that it cost 6s. per lb. in some instances to produce butter. He had known instances where it cost over £1 to produce a pound of butter. Owing to the dry conditions, men had been compelled to cart water six or seven miles for their cattle, and had been compelled to cart fodder, and when they had come to the end of their resources their cattle had died. In arriving at the cost of production, the farmer was entitled to charge, for his own labour and the labour of his family, the amount he would have to pay if he employed labour to do the work; and if the cost of production was fixed on that basis, it would be found that 3s. per lb. would not be too much for butter to-day. The cost of all commodities used by the dairy farmer had increased by over 100 per cent. In 1916 the Government commandeered butter from the various factories at 1s. 4d. per lb., while the average price at which it was sold was 1s. 10d. per lb. Up to the present time, the Government had made no refund to those factories.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: That is a deliberate misstatement of facts. They got £32,000.

Mr. CATTERMULL: He had made inquiries at several factories, and had been told that the statements had never come to hand. If the Minister assured him that the statements had been sent out he would take his word for it.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I find this debate is developing into a discussion on dairying. While that is remotely relevant to the question, still, if allowed to continue, it would open up a discussion on practically every industry in the State. The hon. member should confine himself to the question of the fixation of prices.

Mr. CATTERMULL: If he were out of order, the Chairman should not blame him, as other hon. members had adopted that line of debate. The price asked for by the dairy farmers should have been granted. If they calculated the wages they would have to pay to men to do the work which they now did themselves, 3s. per lb. would not pay. Farmers during the last three or four years had had very bad times and had lost a lot of money, and they should be allowed to-day to get such remuneration from their butter as would enable them to cover some of their losses.

Mr. DUNSTAN (*Gympie*): It was rather regrettable that the party opposite should make an attack upon a reputable officer of the State who held such a responsible position as that of Price Fixing Commissioner; but, while it was regrettable, it was not surprising, because he had heard similar attacks made on a judge of the Arbitration Court when it suited members opposite. At the present time there was a spirit of antagonism between the industrialists and the primary producers, and that should not exist. They all recognised that the primary producer was one of the essential factors in our economic system, and so also was the industrialist; and he thought that instead of strengthening the antagonism which existed between them they should try to solve the problem. That problem would not be solved by the criticisms of hon. members opposite.

[*Mr. Foley.*]

Hon. members could recognise the difficulties with which the Commissioner was faced in fixing a reasonable price for butter. They could not tell from the debate which had taken place whether hon. members opposite believed in London parity or in the price of butter being fixed on the cost of production. Those hon. members were not consistent in arguing that the cost of butter should be based on the cost of production. A reputable man had been appointed as Price Fixing Commissioner because of his recognised ability as a public officer, and they must all know the difficulty that officer had in fixing a reasonable price for butter on the evidence which was brought before him. If the Price Commissioner had not the power at the present time to compel dairymen in every centre of the State and the proprietors of dairy factories to give evidence before him, he should be given that power. His (Mr. Dunstan's) electorate was the centre of a very important dairying community, and a local factory was putting up a record in the production of butter and in the distribution of cheques to suppliers. The people of Gympie were, therefore, largely interested in the growth of the dairying industry in the surrounding district, and they always desired to do a fair thing for the primary producer of the State. But when they were faced with a diversity of opinion and arguments by members on the other side of the House, they could recognise the difficulty the Price Fixing Commissioner had in deciding what was a fair price for butter throughout the State. One important party who gave evidence before the Price Commissioner was the Housewives' Association, and this association had to be regarded as a factor in this business, because it represented the general taxpayer as well as the consumer. He maintained that when the general taxpayer had to bear the burden of the upkeep of departments which were run for the benefit of farmers, the cost of establishing quite a number of railway lines for the benefit of the farmer, the loss entailed by the abolition of the guarantee under the Railways Guarantee Act, the cost of the distribution of seed wheat, and the cost of a number of other activities which were for the benefit of the farmer—then the general taxpayer had a right to be considered in the matter of fixing the price for butter. As reasonable men they, as members of the House, should seek to solve the difficulty with which the Commissioner was faced rather than make the matter a political one and indulge in attacks on a public servant who could not reply. He would suggest that in the matter of the price of butter—

Mr. FLETCHER: Are you satisfied with the price? Do you think the farmer is getting a fair price?

Mr. DUNSTAN: If he were to argue the question of the price he should probably argue with as much diversity as hon. members opposite, because he knew that some dairymen in districts surrounding his electorate received a good cheque per month for their cream, which showed what were the possibilities of getting a fair return at the present price of butter, while, on the other hand, there were other men with small herds who had suffered some privation and hardship, due to drought and other causes, who were not doing so well. When they considered such evidence they would understand how difficult it was for a Price Commissioner to devise a price which was

based on the cost of production. The general taxpayer who had to bear the burden of maintaining activities which were established for the benefit of the man on the land were entitled to a price which was fair to the consumer as well as to the producer. As a matter of fact the dairymen were receiving the fixed price on only one-third of the output. When people had something to sell they wanted to sell it in the dearest market, but when they wished to buy they would take all the price fixing they could get. It was pointed out by the hon. member for Bowen that the farmers were quite in favour of the fixation of the price of fertilisers, and so they were in other instances. He had heard farmers in his own district talk loudly against the evil principle of price-fixing in regard to butter, and they complained because the Government had taken no action in regard to the fixation of the price of bacon, because they were producing the butter but not the other commodity. They all desired to see the primary producers prosper; and they wished to see that men who reared families, and had to depend on their wages with which to get the products they required, should likewise prosper. If there were a consensus of opinion of the other side as to what was the best method to give a fair return to primary producers as well as to the workers, it would go a long way in the progress of the State.

The PREMIER: He deprecated the attacks which had been made by hon. members opposite against the Price Fixing Commissioner in connection with this matter. (Hear, hear!) He was an officer who was highly esteemed in the public service, not only by this Government, but by previous Governments, too, and capable, efficient, and conscientious in carrying out his duties. (Hear, hear!) He thought the attack made upon him had been monstrously mean.

Mr. MORGAN: Don't you remember attacking public officers when you were on this side?

The PREMIER: When there was justification for it. When the Labour party were sitting in opposition, and had any attacks to make, they attacked those who were responsible, and they were not afraid to place responsibility on the right shoulders. (Hear, hear!) If hon. members opposite were honest and not so mean as they had exhibited themselves to-night, they would attack the Government, and attack Parliament, which had passed the Act under which the Price Fixing Commissioner was working. What was the use of blaming the Price Fixing Commissioner for carrying out his duties under the Act? If there was any complaint, let it be made against those who were responsible. The Government introduced the measure into the House, which agreed to it; and the Commissioner was merely carrying out his duties under it. The Commissioner would carry out his duties as prescribed by the Act. If the Act laid it down that the Commissioner was to arrive at the prices in accordance with the world's parity, he would do it; he simply carried out the duties as prescribed under the Act, and the Government was willing to take the responsibility. He had listened all the evening to the arguments which had been used, in the hope of getting some light thrown on the subject of the fixation of prices for primary products; but there was considerable confusion in the minds of hon. members, especially those on the other side, as to

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what constituted primary products, and what commodities should come under the price-fixing. No one could say that they had arrived at the final word in regard to the fixation of prices. Some of those hon. members who had been most illogical in regard to the criticism of this vote were those who accepted price-fixing so far as sugar was concerned, which was a primary product; and there were many others who would represent to the Commissioner the necessity of fixing the prices of agricultural machinery, fertilisers, or other things which would benefit the agricultural community; but they seemed to think there was no logic or wisdom, and only some evil motive, behind the Price Fixing Commissioner when there was a price fixed for butter.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: Why not have a board, and not one man?

The PREMIER: That was simply getting away from the point. The question that had interested him in following the debate was whether there was any logical reason why butter or dairy products should be removed from the operation of the Act. What was the use of making personal attacks upon the Commissioner? The Government would take the final responsibility of any decision he gave in the matter—as to whether dairy products should remain under the Act or be exempted from its operation. If the Government firmly believed that, in the interests of the whole community, there should be some regulation of prices, and that the principle of fixation is a logical and reasonable principle and of benefit to the whole community, they were not so stubborn on the point that they thought it could be applied universally and should be so applied. If reasonable arguments could be adduced to show that the application of that kind of machinery and legislation was likely to have a detrimental effect upon a primary industry, the Government was open to be convinced upon the matter. Hon. members opposite, and those who had been most violent in their outburst, apparently did not know what primary products were. He was asked by a Country party member the other day as to what particular primary products had come under the influence of price-fixing; and when he referred to certain things as timber, that hon. member scoffed at the suggestion of those things being primary products. The use of the term had been mishandled in a way that indicated the confusion that existed in the minds of hon. members. Ores taken out of the mines were primary products, but cheese was not a primary product in the ordinary acceptance of the term.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: What is it?

The PREMIER: It was a manufactured product. (Loud laughter.) They had to some extent to classify this question of primary products, or primary secondary products, or whatever classification they liked to adopt; but it was obvious that sawn timber was not a primary product in the ordinary acceptance of the term, although logs from the forest might be. They should have the thing thoroughly thrashed out here, and it could be done without heat and without the personal attacks which had been made against the Price Fixing Commissioner.

Mr. EDWARDS (*Nanango*): He wished to say a few words on this question, which was so important to the development of Queensland. He would say without hesitation

[*Hon. E. G. Theodore.*

that the inquiry with regard to butter should not have been held. The Premier said that he wished to get something to guide him as to whether certain primary products should be taken out of the hands of the Price Fixing Commissioner. Butter was one that should be taken out of his hands, because they believed in the co-operative principle, and hon. members opposite would be with them in that. Butter was handled and sold co-operatively by societies in Queensland. They had also established a place in London through which to handle it co-operatively, and that was the reason why butter should be taken out of the hands of the Price Fixing Commissioner. He thought it was a pity that the inquiry was held. The producers of butter were receiving 274s. for their butter in Victoria for local consumption. Hon. members opposite who were interested in country districts would be with him when he said that that was not the way to induce settlers to come from the Southern States or other parts of the world to spend their money in assisting to develop Queensland. After all, a successful dairyman was not a fool, and when he was [9.30 p.m.] going to settle on the land in any State he took everything carefully into consideration. If a prospective dairy farmer had figures placed before him which showed that in Queensland the dairyman got 238s. per cwt. for his butter, while in New South Wales and Victoria he would get 274s., he would see that it was not a successful proposition to settle down in Queensland. Hon. members opposite will see that that was not the way to develop this great State. There has been a lot said about what it cost to manufacture a pound of butter, and some members opposite seemed to doubt the figures which had been quoted. That is because they did not know what it meant to carry on the dairying industry. Members opposite ridiculed the idea that it would cost 6s. to produce a pound of butter, yet he (Mr. Edwards) knew dairymen who could only produce butter at a cost of something like 10s. per lb. during the last two or three years. In his district, and in many other districts in Queensland, dairymen who used to milk sixty or seventy cows before the drought were now milking seven or eight cows. These dairymen spent every penny they possessed on their farms, and they had to drive their cattle about looking for agistment.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. gentleman to confine his remarks to the question before the Committee.

Mr. EDWARDS: He was showing how the dairymen were up against it, so far as the cost of producing butter was concerned. They knew that the dairymen lost a number of their cows during the drought, and all that added to the cost of production. They knew from statistics that 8,000 milking cows were lost during the drought. In connection with other products, he knew that many of the producers were not getting back what they paid for seed and the cost of growing. The seed potatoes cost £15 to £25 per ton, and the farmers went to a lot of trouble to grow them. The prices realised for potatoes on the market to-day would not pay the cost of digging and sending them to market. The market price of potatoes to-day was 4s. to 4s. 6d. per cwt. It cost 2s. to dig them, and 1s. for the bag; and if they added

the cost of cartage to the railway station they would see that the farmer got nothing for himself at all. The producers in Queensland were right up against it in every respect. It was time they considered these matters from the point of view of the producer and not from the point of view of the consumers in the large centres of population. Everyone knew that they must adopt different methods if they wanted to develop the country as it should be developed. The farmers who went in for co-operation spent their time and money in manufacturing butter, and the consumers in the large centres of population had no right to interfere with them at all when they were asking for a fair price for their butter. It was time that hon. gentlemen opposite saw that the producers got a fair thing for the commodities they produced, as that was the only way to develop Queensland as it should be developed.

Mr. SIZER (*Yundah*) said he was sympathetic with those dairymen who had passed through a bad time, but he thought that butter was not the only question to be considered in relation to price-fixing. The arguments put forward all day had been against the Price Fixing Commissioner for not giving a sufficient price for a certain article. He (Mr. Sizer) was going to use an argument to show that price-fixing was a failure, because Mr. Ferry had fixed a higher price for one article than he should have done. He was not going to say anything personal about Mr. Ferry. (Hear, hear!) He believed Mr. Ferry was endeavouring to do his best to the utmost of his ability. One could understand how difficult his duties were when he had to fix prices for all sorts of things, from butter to hosiery. He (Mr. Sizer) would take a line of drapery known as Horrockses' calico. In 1916 it cost 4½d. per yard to land that calico in Brisbane, and it was sold at 5d. to 6d. per yard, or 4s. 11d. to 5s. 11d. per dozen. That left a profit of 6d. to 1s. 6d. per dozen yards. That was considered to be an adequate profit, realising, as the trade did, that it was a bread-and-butter line. To-day it cost 2s. 2½d. to land Horrockses' calico in Brisbane, and Mr. Ferry allowed the drapers to add 45 per cent. to that, bringing the profit to 11s. 6d. per dozen yards, as against a profit of 6d. to 1s. 6d. in 1916, with which the drapers were satisfied at that time. Had 20 per cent. or 25 per cent. been allowed, it would have been ample. Some traders informed Mr. Ferry that their overhead charges amounted to 27½ per cent. That was hardly a fair statement. It might take 27½ per cent. for a business which worked largely on the credit system, but it would not be more than 17½ per cent. on a cash business. There ought to be two prices fixed if price-fixing were adopted—one for cash transactions, and the other for credit. He had in his hand a copy of the "Daily Standard," in which two firms were advertising Horrockses' calico at 1s. 11d. per yard and another at 1s. 10d. per yard. That calico, up till quite recently, was costing from 2s. to 2s. 2½d. per yard to land in Brisbane. Had those firms taken the 45 per cent. allowed by Mr. Ferry, they would have been charging 3s. 2d. per yard, and it would have been impossible to sell calico. That proved that price-fixing had completely failed. The whole of the trade was dependent upon competition, and there was no need for the

price-fixer. If the trader were to stand hard and fast to the percentages allowed by the price-fixer, it would be a very bad deal for the consumer. He did not think the primary producers were getting too much for their butter, and he was of the opinion that the average person in the community did not desire to have butter cheaply at the expense of the farmers. (Hear, hear!) He believed the people in the city were desirous of obtaining the highest prices they reasonably could for their products, and they must grant the same concession to the primary producer. Price-fixing would not lead them anywhere. It might have been necessary in extraordinary circumstances, but they would be entirely wrong in accepting it as an economic principle. The man in the city, particularly the smaller man, in the course of his business probably had as many difficulties and worries to contend with as the primary producer had—except the climatic conditions, which must be given great consideration. He did not go as far as to support the adoption of world's parity in every direction, because he did not think it was possible. At the present time they should take into consideration the cost of production, bearing in mind the high prices of fodder, together with the loss of profits during the last few years; and they should give something in the way of an additional price to recompense them for their years of loss and hardship. He had always been opposed to the exploitation of the consumer. Where it could be proved—and there should be adequate means of proving it—they should be singled out and dealt with—even, if need be, under the criminal law. The Government had the Control of Trade Act to operate the whole of the time they were in office, and refused to operate it.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: No.

Mr. SIZER: The hon. gentleman knew that that was so. This Act had been passed in an endeavour to obtain political kudos. Whether the Government had succeeded, he did not know; but, since it had come into operation, they had more members on that side of the House than they had before. He seriously suggested to the Government that they should consider whether it was advisable to continue the office of Price Fixing Commissioner or abolish the position and save the expense, and, if some kind of a price-fixing was thought to be necessary, whether it could be done by public servants in other capacities. He did not think the results warranted the present expense.

At ten minutes to 10 o'clock p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. ELPHINSTONE (*Oakey*): Anyone listening to the debate must be convinced that it had been an entire condemnation of the principle of price-fixing; and he must also admit that, if there had been sufficient champions in the House of other commodities than butter, they would have made just as great an outcry against the fixing of the prices of those commodities as there had been in connection with butter. The whole thing really demonstrated the argument they advanced when the Act was originally before the Chamber—that any system which aimed at price-fixing was bound to fail and was totally unsound.

For his part, he did not intend to take a hand in assailing the Commissioner. (Hear,

Mr. Elphinstone.]

hear!) He believed that that officer had done his duty in accordance with the regulations placed before him from time to time, and did his best to carry them out. He was merely the creature of circumstances, and had an impossible task before him. He could not please both sides—which again showed the impossibility of successfully fixing prices. Whilst the war was on and production was interfered with, it was a palliative in different parts of the world; but he did not know a country, or a Government, which had embraced the argument that price-fixing was going to overcome the evils attendant upon lack of production; and the sooner this Government and this country appreciated that fact, the sooner would they get back to production in the proper sense of the term. (Hear, hear!) In his opinion, the Government would show their broadmindedness in simply making the Act inoperative. They had done their best to satisfy "the man in the street," whose knowledge was insufficient to enable him to understand that decreased production must lead to a certain extent to exploitation and fluctuation in prices. What was exploitation? Which of them would not indulge in exploitation if given the opportunity? They were all human. If they bought an article for 1s., the market price of which was 2s. 6d., would they sell it for 1s. 6d.? Not one of them, if he were honest to himself. And to advance any argument on exploitation was ridiculous. It all resolved itself into a question of opportunity, and therefore the best way to deprive men of the opportunity of exploitation was to make the producers so numerous that they did not have a chance of asking unfair prices. A member on the opposite side made reference to potatoes. It was only a few months, he thought, since they were fetching up to about £50 a ton, whereas to-day, if he was rightly informed, the price was approximately £5 a ton? Why was that? For the simple reason that there was such a production that every consumer was satisfied and there was almost a glut. Production had settled the question of exploitation, if any, in potatoes. Exactly the same argument applied all round, and he just wanted to point to what seemed to be the pith of their discussion—that was, the condemnation, lock, stock, and barrel, of the price-fixing proposition; not condemnation of the gentleman who had endeavoured to carry out the regulations under the Act, but condemnation of the principle; and the sooner they discarded it and got back to production in the ordinary sense of the term, free and unfettered, the sooner would they overcome the difficulties which the Act was intended to remove.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Mr. G. P. BARNES (*Warwick*): The interest which had been taken in the fixing of the price of butter existed because no other article had been in quite the same position as butter. Unfortunately, no individuals had been pursued in their calling to anything like the same extent as the dairy farmer. Hon. members opposite came into office on the ticket of cheap bread, cheap butter, and cheap beef; and he unhesitatingly said that the dairy farmer had been pursued right from the jump to the present moment, and therefore it was not to be wondered at that the whole of the sitting had been devoted to a consideration of his case, simply because that side of the Com-

mittee realised that the time had come when liberation must be his lot. Who was going to blame the Commissioner for the fact that at the instance of the Government the dairy farmer of Queensland had to sell his commodity at 4d. per lb. less than his brother in any other part of Australia?

The PREMIER: Half your members have blamed him.

Mr. G. P. BARNES: The Commissioner was acting largely at the instance of the Government of the day. He did not blame him. He had carried out his work all right; but no man could come to a just decision regarding the matter unless he took in the whole life and work of the dairy farmer, not for one year, but for two or three years. At the present time the dairy farmer was entitled to every penny that he could get out of his industry. Hon. members on the Opposition side accepted the Premier's challenge, which they believed was made in good faith, because they believed that he wanted to know if price-fixing had been detrimental to the farming industry. There were one or two members on the other side who knew that it had been distinctly detrimental; but every member on his side of the Chamber knew that, not only had the Government price-fixing policy been detrimental, but their interference during the whole five years they had been in office had been very injurious to the farmers. The Government, and not the Price Fixing Commissioner, were responsible. As a result of their interference with the industry, the number of persons engaged in dairying and farming had decreased by no less than 8,600 since the Government took office. There were still 16,000 persons engaged in the industry, but the reduction was so serious that it was no wonder the Opposition side took up the cudgels on behalf of men who had been attacked all along the line. Nothing had stirred him more than the indignity that had been put upon the dairy farmers during the last twelve months. Just imagine dairy farmers being called to Brisbane to give evidence as to the cost of this and the cost of that! It was no credit to any Government to allow men to be treated as the dairy farmers had been in that matter, and the country was stirred from end to end with indignation on the subject. Was it any wonder if some of the witnesses had given vent to their feelings when under examinations? Hon. members opposite had defamed the dairy farmers that evening. If those hon. members realised the conditions of the dairying industry, they would understand how it was quite possible that it had cost the dairy farmer 6s. 9d. per lb. to produce his butter.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: What do you consider a fair price?

Mr. G. P. BARNES: To-day the farmer was getting a fair price; but it was not a fair price having regard to the fact that it was less than the dairy farmers in the other States were getting, and having regard to his losses from drought for several years past. If the Government ceased their interference, prices would accord to the world's parity. The Secretary for Agriculture had gone back to the year 1896. What relevancy was there in that? There was no analogy between prices in 1896 and prices to-day, when the Government had deliberately kept

[*Mr. Elphinstone.*

down the price. He was not exaggerating when he said that, if the figures could be tabulated, a sum of not less than £1,000,000 had been lost to the dairy farmers of Queensland as a result of the interference of the Government. To show the position of the dairy farmers, he would quote from Table E of the annual report of the Commissioner of Taxes. That table gave the percentages of tax payable by each class on the 1918-1919 incomes, and it showed that the tax assessed with respect to dairy farmers was £4,874, which represented .29 of the total tax. Yet the Government refused to allow the dairymen the opportunity to avail themselves of the present splendid opportunity—an opportunity not brought about by the Government, but by the unfortunate untoward conditions ruling in other parts of the world. The Government had prevented them from recouping themselves for the losses of several years. If they took the next figures they would find something in connection with employees. The tax assessed in that case was £84,938, and the percentage to the total tax was 5.6. If they took farmers generally, they would find that the farmers were assessed on £4,041, and the percentage to the total tax was .24. Enough had been said, and he believed the Premier and the Secretary for Agriculture were right in their conclusions when they said they were not great believers in price-fixing. The Premier indicated in a manly way that he wanted to know if anything had been done that was detrimental to the industry. If the hon. gentleman looked around, and did not confine his vision to what had been said in the House, he would realise that the dairying industry had been decidedly hurt and injured as a result of interference and price-fixing by the Government.

Mr. POLLOCK (*Gregory*): He had been rather surprised at the attitude of hon. members opposite in criticising the Price Fixing Commissioner personally. He was one who helped to pass the Price Fixing Act, and the Government, as all Governments did, passed the regulations; and it was on the Labour party and on the Government as a Labour Government that the criticisms should rest. He certainly had an unholy contempt for a body of men who were not game to stand up and criticise a party Government for its actions, but took the mean and dirty course of going behind the back of the Price Fixing Commissioner and criticising that gentleman who had no opportunity to reply. It was dirty, mean, and low to say, as the hon. member for Drayton did, that the Price Fixing Commissioner was doing as the Government told him. That was unfair criticism. The Price Fixing Commissioner had done the best he possibly could consistent with the Act he had to administer, and he could not give satisfaction to all parties. They all recognised that it would take a veritable saint to give satisfaction to the general public in the matter of price fixing. The Price Fixing Commissioner seemed to have as his boss every individual in Queensland, and no matter whether he reduced prices, whether he allowed them to remain at the present level, or whether he increased them, somebody was going to be discontented; but those who were discontented might well adopt a sporting attitude and say that the man was honest and had tried to do his best.

Mr. BRAND: Do you think he made a mistake?

Mr. POLLOCK: Did members of the Opposition think he had made a mistake? He wanted to know, because he had seen the Price Fixing Commissioner a few moments before and was informed that not one member of the Opposition had seen the evidence.

Mr. BEBBINGTON: We all read it.

Mr. POLLOCK: You read it in a biased paper, the "Courier." Not one member of the Opposition had gone to the Commissioner and asked for a copy of the evidence or for the returns that were submitted to him by the dairymen.

Mr. WALKER: Did he send the various associations a copy of the evidence that was asked for? No, he did not.

Mr. POLLOCK: Members of the Opposition criticised the Price Fixing Commissioner personally.

Mr. WALKER: We have a right to do it.

Mr. POLLOCK: Members of the Opposition had criticised Mr. Ferry, without being aware of the facts of the case, for asking the dairymen to provide evidence and returns going back seven years. He wanted the dairymen to give returns for three years, and it was on the recommendation of the dairymen's representative, Mr. Harris, that Mr. Ferry asked them to produce evidence and returns for seven years; and now the hon. member for Cooroora came along and "bellyached" against the Commissioner when he had not extended to the Commissioner the ordinary courtesy of inquiring from him the facts of the case.

Mr. MORGAN: He was doing his duty to his electorate.

Mr. POLLOCK: If the hon. member was doing his duty to his electorate and if other hon. members were doing their duty to their electorates, they would have ascertained from the Commissioner full particulars in regard to the matter, instead of believing that dirty, scurrilous rag—the "Courier." Hon. members said the Commissioner had fixed a price for butter lower than what the dairymen had a right to expect; but did they see the evidence and the returns on which the Commissioner based his decision?

Mr. MORGAN: We see the evidence every day of our lives.

Mr. POLLOCK: If the hon. member were born in a cowyard he would not understand the ordinary rudiments of dairying.

Mr. MORGAN: You were born in the gutter.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. member to withdraw that statement, as it is quite unparliamentary.

Mr. MORGAN: The hon. member insinuated something about himself, and he should be asked to withdraw.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member must withdraw.

Mr. MORGAN: As it was unparliamentary, he would withdraw.

The CHAIRMAN: I point out to hon. members generally that there is a tendency on both sides of the House to indulge in interjections that are quite disorderly. Interjections are disorderly at all times, but there have been interjections during the last few days of a nature that hon. members should not indulge in, and I must request hon. members to refrain.

Mr. Smith.]

Mr. POLLOCK: Hon. members would do the wise thing if they would peruse the Commissioner's report; if they would go carefully through the evidence that was laid before him, and ask themselves if on that evidence they would have come to a different conclusion to what the Commissioner did, before they criticised the Commissioner who was not able to reply. They did not know whether they would or not, as they had never seen the evidence.

Mr. COSTELLO (*Carnarvon*): He did not wish to indulge in personalities in connection with the Price Fixing Commissioner. Any criticisms he had to offer would be directed to the Government. He held that it was a mistake on the part of the Government to ask one man to decide such a question as the price of primary products, including the price of butter. The Government, when they decided to make inquiries as to the cost of producing butter or to interfere with industry from a primary producer's point of view, should have appointed as Commissioner a practical farmer, who would have done justice not only to the primary producer but also to the consumer. The Government in this matter had not considered the primary producer as they should have done. Our primary industries were stagnant at the present time, and the Government should be prepared to lend them a helping hand, as those industries needed nursing. But the Government seemed to consider that the man who was a producer was a man who was in a position to pay all taxes. The men on the land to-day were in a worse position than the men who worked in and around Brisbane. If one went round Brisbane, one would find comfortable homes. The workers' homes in the city were more comfortable than 80 per cent. of the farmers' homes throughout the district of Carnarvon. Then, why not give those men an opportunity to get level with the men whose wages were fixed in Brisbane? If they were going to fix the price of primary products, they should remember that at the present time a number of people were depending wholly and solely upon the production of vegetables or fruit. Returned men were depending on the production of vegetables alone at the present time. Yet a 36-lb. bag of peas was sold the other day for 6d.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Do you suggest price-fixing there?

Mr. COSTELLO: Yes, if they were going to have price-fixing in regard to other products.

The SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE: Don't you think the butter farmer is better off with price-fixing than the fruit farmer without price-fixing?

Mr. COSTELLO: His idea was that, if they fixed the price of one class of commodity, they should fix the prices of other commodities which were exceedingly low. The man on the land who had a wife and family, and who worked more hours per week than the ordinary labourer in the city, did not receive anything like fair remuneration for his labour. Producers generally were not getting that remuneration to which they were entitled for the amount of time they put in in cultivating the land as compared with the remuneration received by men whose wages were fixed by the Arbitration Court. He would suggest that, if the Government were going to fix the price of butter, they should also fix the prices of

other primary products. The producers of vegetables could not make an honest living out of the industry at the prices they were able to obtain at the present time. One member supporting the Government referred to the cost of living in this State as compared with the cost of living in the other States, particularly Victoria, but the figures he gave with regard to Victoria were altogether wrong. He asked the Government to consider those people who had struggled through the last lean years and lived from hand to mouth—almost living on the store-keeper, by whom their credit was limited to such articles as flour and sugar and those commodities which were necessary to keep body and soul together. Many of those people had lost their stock, and some had not been put on land which was altogether suitable for dairying or fruitgrowing, and the seasons had been against them. Down along the Severn River at the present time there was not a willow tree left.

At half-past 10 o'clock p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN said: Under Standing Order No. 306, I now leave the chair, and make my report to the House.

The House resumed. The CHAIRMAN reported progress, and the Committee obtained leave to sit again to-morrow.

The House adjourned at twenty-nine minutes to 11 o'clock p.m.

[*Mr. Pollock.*