NORTHERN AND CENTRAL SEPARATION.

PROPOSED REFERENDUM.

Mr. KIDSTON, in moving—

That, in the opinion of this House, provision should be made to enable the electors of Northern and Central Queensland to give a direct expression of opinion at the next ensuing general election as to whether they consider it desirable that their respective districts should be separated from Southern Queensland and constituted self-governing colonies—

said: In bringing forward this motion I shall be as brief as I can, because I want to get a division on it this afternoon, and also because there is other private business on the paper which hon. members desire to push forward. For many years back the question of separation has been before the House and the country, and there is probably no question in the political affairs of Queensland with which politicians have played so fast and loose. They have blown hot or cold upon it, just as it has suited themselves or their parties. It was said some years ago that the success of the Labour party in Northern and Central Queensland had very much cooled the ardour of what may be called, for want of a better name, the capitalist members in those divisions in the pursuit of separation. I remember very well when my colleague, Mr. Curtis, proposed a motion in this House some four years ago the then Premier, Sir T. McIlwraith, openly twitted the Central and Northern members with praying to God in their hearts that the motion would not be carried. I am not saying that that is true, but the remark was made. It is said, on the other hand, that the Labour members are not sincere in the matter, but are only using the question as a party device, and if both parties are only using the question as a party device, then the best thing to do is to put the matter before the people themselves. It has been said that a great number of people in the Western districts are opposed to separation; that it is merely a movement run by the people of Rockhampton, in Rockhampton interests. There may be some truth in that, but I do not think the remark is justified, because I am of the opinion that separation would do just as much good to the Western districts as to Rockhampton or Townsville. The matter should, therefore, be put into the hands of the people, east and west, and let them decide. It may be said that this is a Labour party device, and although it is true that a Labour member, Mr. Dawson, has the honour of first suggesting this way of settling the matter, it is nevertheless true that the same policy was adopted by the Opposition two years ago, under the leadership of Messrs. Powers, Groom, and Drake; and if they had been returned to power it would now have been part of the Government programme. The motion I am proposing now does not directly raise the question of separation, and I have no intention of trying to prove its importance to those immediately concerned, but I simply say that in spite of all differences between ourselves the best way to have the matter settled is to let the people decide it themselves. They have a right to be directly consulted on the matter, and I think the greatness of the issue in regard to the wellbeing of the people demands it.

Mr. MURRAY: Were not you sent here as a separatistionist?

Mr. KIDSTON: Yes; and I hope that I am showing that I am a separationist. And I also hope that when the motion goes to a division the hon. member who interrupts me will show that he is a separationist, although lately he has become a very cool one. This House has asserted, and I am glad that it has asserted, that it is desirable that the people of the colony should
be consulted upon the matter of federation. However important federation may be, and however anxious the people of the North and Centre may be to see it accomplished, there is no gaining the fact that very many of them have separation very much nearer their hearts than federation; and if it should be necessary, as it is, that they should be consulted upon federation, it is equally necessary that they should be consulted on separation. As a rule, when it would be most suitable to consult them, when I said last year that I would be prepared to take a vote at any time, it was pointed out that the proper time would be at a general election, and I recognised that there is no possibility of having a vote taken previous to a general election I have put that time in my motion. At the same time I should like to say that it is possible, although by no means certain, that there will be an election throughout Queensland before the general election. It is possible that there may be an election of federal delegates, and if there is then I submit that for the purpose of my motion it would be a general election, and a referendum on the question of separation might be taken at the same time. It may be said that there is need to put the question direct to the people—and the people have already expressed themselves, and can express themselves again at a general election. But I contend that that is just what they cannot do at a general election, as the opinion would be so mixed up with other questions that it would be extremely difficult to decide how far any particular question affected the general result. It must not be forgotten that the main purpose of a general election is not to decide this question or that, but to appoint representatives. It is the choice of persons and parties, rather than any particular question, and very often the personal element enters very largely into the matter. It has often happened that a man has carried an election by his mere force of character, quite apart from the policy he opposes or advocates. Take our own circumstances. When the next general election comes about the main question before the electors will be undoubtedly whether the present Government are to be retained in office or not.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: We may be out before that.

Mr. Kidston: I hope so, but it is too good a thing to hope for. Suppose, at the next general election a Labour candidate who is a separationist is opposed by a Government supporter who is opposed to separation, what would be the position of an elector who has a great fear of the Labour party, but is a separationist? What is he to do in such a dilemma? Or put it the other way about. Suppose the Government supporter is a separationist, and the Labour man is opposed to separation.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: The country will survive it.

Mr. Kidston: No doubt it will; nevertheless it shows that it is extremely difficult to deduce from the result of a general election the actual opinion of the electors on any given question. Even in a case where all the members returned are in favour of separation it might only prove that in each electorate a small number of separationists who loudly expressed themselves induced their candidates to pledge themselves to separation, while the great body were so indifferent about the matter as not even to vote against a man who opposed separation. I maintain that the only way to get a clear unequivocal expression of opinion on this question is to put the matter as a direct issue before the people themselves. After all, it is the people that have the right to control their own destiny. If the people have not that right, who is in Queensland? And if they have that right I think we ought to enable them to exercise it in the most effectual manner. Moreover, I put it to every sincere separationist that it is wise to try and get the people with us in the movement. If we can get the people to desire the movement to come to a successful issue, that great moral force that cannot be got at all except through the influence of the people. The time has gone by when a great political movement of this sort can be carried to a successful issue unless the people are actively at the back of it. Fifty years ago, as someone has said, the people were nothing; now they are everything; and it is of the utmost importance for those who desire to see the movement carried to a successful issue that the people should be got to take an active and living interest in the matter; and no method I can think of would so effect this result as putting the question before them in a direct manner. Separationists would recognise that it was "now or never" with them; and my belief is that if this were done it would bring the matter to a final issue. If any better method for achieving the same result can be suggested, I am willing to take the benefit of it. I suggest this because I do not know any better method, and I think there is no better method. I wish now to call attention to another aspect of the case, and I do so with all deference and respect to the opinions of others. I refer to the position in which we are placed with regard to the question of federation, and I think that forms a strong reason why we should take some such action as I suggest in this motion. The attitude of the Imperial Government towards the question of separation may be gathered from a letter of Mr. Chamberlain of the 16th January, 1896, from which I will just read some extracts—

Unless an overwhelming case could be made out ... Her Majesty's Government would not be justified in seeking the Imperial Parliament to undertake so delicate and difficult a task. ... Most of these difficulties would disappear should the several colonies of Australasia enter into a Federal Union. ... And if such a union is accomplished, and such a principle is included in the Federation ... the people of Central Queensland will not doubt that the Federal Parliament, when constituted, ready to listen to any reasonable scheme which may be submitted to it with the object of giving them that control of their own local affairs which they now seek.

It seems to me that two things are clear from that statement: First, that the Imperial Government will not act until the state of affairs in the colony becomes so acute that they are compelled to act; second, that the Imperial Government want us to wait for federation—they would very much prefer that this delicate and difficult task should be passed on to the Federal Parliament. I will just quote a portion of clause 117 of the Federal Constitution, which will show what chance we shall have if we depend upon getting separation from the Federal Parliament.

A new State shall not be formed by separation of territory from a State without the consent of the Parliament thereof.

On the one hand we are asked by the Imperial Government to wait until we have federation; and on the other hand the Federal Constitution takes away from the Federal Parliament the right to grant us any such request. While the Imperial Parliament has now the power to grant us separation even in opposition to the wishes of this Parliament, yet the Imperial Parliament asserts to the Federal Constitution they will give away their right to grant us separation. But the Federal Parliament will not get the same sort of business in its power that will have the power to divide Queensland will be the Parliament of Queensland.
I submit that it looks as if there was a danger of us being caught in a clefist without any hope of redress at all. It has been suggested that we might get that clause in the Federal Constitution altered. My hon. colleague mentioned some time ago that it was his intention when the Federal Constitution came before this House to make an objection at all that that clause in the Constitution should be altered. I smiled at the idea of asking this Parliament to alter the Federal Constitution in that way, because if it did it would be the first time on record of a Parliament giving away such a power; and the chance of getting the Convention itself to alter the Federal Constitution in that way is just as hopeless, for the representatives of the other colonies would be just as strongly opposed to the Federal Parliament having the power to divide their States without the consent of their Parliaments as the Parliament of Queensland could be. So that I say there is no prospect of getting that provision in the Federal Constitution altered, and that should make the people of the Centre and North very cautious before they take up the question of federation. In the meantime we have the right of appeal of the people if a Parliament shall do what is wrong in the hands of the people, and nothing can be unconstitutional in this country which proposes to give the people a direct voice in their own affairs. The more I think of the situation the more I am convinced that the only condition on which the people of the Centre and North can discuss federation is that Queensland should enter the federation as three States. That is why I suggest that if this referendum is taken at all it should be taken along with the election of federation delegates. We should then be in this position: that if federation resulted we should have a claim to enter the federation as three States, and if federation did not result—if the project failed, or if Queensland refused to go—our way would be clear with what I consider would be an overwhelming case to make a final appeal to the Imperial Government. It has been objected that this proposal is unconstitutional, simply a revolutionary project of the Labour party. I have shown that it was the policy of the Opposition two years ago, and I must frankly say that no objection that has been raised against the proposal has surprised me so much as this. The only question is, that the project is unconstitutional, and I was particularly surprised at the quarter from which that objection came. I remember that in the old heroic days of separation, five years ago, if a member gave a crouch vote on separation in this House he was burned in effigy at Rockhampton. They were not then over-wise in asking whether a thing was constitutional. It was blood they wanted; they proposed to take separation at the point of the bayonet. I remember well how I was blamed at the time for being unenthusiastic in supporting the bayonet proposal. As a matter of fact I never believed in that sort of talk, whether it was from unionists or separationists. I believe that the ballot is the thing, for the reason that if you cannot get men to face the ballot-box you will not get them to face the bayonet; and if you can get them to do their duty at the ballot-box there is not the slightest need for using the bayonet. Now this very mild proposition, in comparison with what was then proposed, is called unconstitutional.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: Who called it so?

Mr. KDSTON: I am sorry that I did not bring with me an article published in a Rockhampton paper, in which it was called unconstitutional, because it dealt with the French Revolution after the best style of the Secretary for Public Instruction, and I am sure it would have pleased him very much. I am, however, only pointing out that time brings strange revenges. I do not think there is anything in the charge that this proposal is unconstitutional. The truth of the matter is that I am surprised that any man who has the most elementary knowledge of political history should put forward such a charge. If I admit the proposal is unusual, but it is no more unconstitutional than the absence of the Premier from the colony when Parliament is sitting. I believe it is in strict conformity with the essential principle of the British Constitution. The essential principle of the British Constitution is not King, Lords, and Commons, or even representative government. The fundamental principle of the British Constitution is government of the people by the people. While some countries have tied up their liberties in written Constitutions the British people have never done that.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: We have.

Mr. KDSTON: We have in a certain sense; that could not be avoided; but we have not tied them up to such an extent that a proposal of this sort is unconstitutional. We have not tied up the liberties of the people any more than the hands of the people, and nothing can be unconstitutional in this country which proposes to give the people a direct voice in their own affairs. Some years ago the matter was under discussion in England, and Mr. Dicey, Mr. Bryce, the historian of the American Commonwealth, and Professor Newman, the historian of the English Constitution, all discussed it, and to none of them did it occur that such a proposal was unconstitutional. Indeed, they all agreed that the time had come when the adoption of it in England should be seriously discussed. I have a number of authorities with me, but I regret to say that I am taking up more time than I had intended, and therefore I shall not read them all. I shall only say that Professor Newman, in referring to the folk moot in England, the well-spring of all popular liberty in our country, and of the whole modern system of self-government, and in noticing that in larger communities the representative system has become a necessity, says—

"But the two spring from the same source. The referendum is true. The application to changed circumstances of the still abiding principle of the ancient institution. This is a quotation from the Universal Review, vol. 7, page 582. He goes on to say—"

A way may be found to give every citizen some direct share in legislation. The representative body can alone discuss and settle details of legislative measures, but the direct voice of the citizens can be allowed a sphere of action at either or both ends of the process.

The matter was brought up by Sir Francis Adams, the historian of the Swiss Confederation, who said that there were at that time a number of questions before the people of England, notably that of Home Rule, which were evidently fitted for submission to a direct vote of the people. Professor Freeman, in referring to the question of Home Rule, said that it was a question so purely Irish that it ought to be decided by an Irish vote only. Professor Freeman knows as much about the philosophy under constitutionalism and the principles of the question under discussion as any man. He is an authority on the subject.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: There are a great many other authorities.

Mr. KDSTON: He shows that there is some reason in confining the vote on this question to the people of the Centre and the North, as this motion proposes. I will read what is said by Professor Dicey in the Contemporary Review, vol. 57, page 486—

"It would, of course, be new and anomalous. It would, therefore, be called unconstitutional by every man who
fears the result of an appeal to the people. But this employment of the veto would be in strict conformity with the principles which have governed the growth of the Commonwealth. By the use of the rejection of the preceptive, or by direct parliamentary enactment, the referendum may easily be introduced among the political institutions of the British Empire; it may be introduced either in a general form or experimentally in regard to a particular question. There is no lack of mechanism for achieving this object—the resources of the Constitution are infinite.

Coming nearer home, I see from the Contemporary Review for August, 1897, that a Royal Commission was appointed in Victoria in 1894, which reported as follows:—

The commission are strongly impressed with the advantages of the referendum. It provides a simple method of obtaining an accurate expression of the popular will on questions involving great issues. It is a better method of deciding than a general election. It is more direct and unequivocal. It is the proper way of recognising the sovereignty of the people.

Mr. Shields dissented from the report of the commission as to the general application of the referendum, but he says this:—

I recognise that there are manifest advantages in the referendum, and approve it as the best means of ascertaining the true opinions of the people on questions involving great changes, of which can be submitted in clear and simple form directly to the electors.

That exactly covers the case involved in my motion. Last year Referendum Bills were actually introduced in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand, and in Victoria a Bill was introduced by a private member. It seems that in this matter of the referendum Queensland lags behind the other Australian colonies as much as she does in the matter of electoral reform.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: The referendum is thousands of years old. How can we be lagging behind then?

Mr. KIDSTON: I have just been saying that it is the same in principle as the oldest political institution of the British race. I am only answering the charge that it is unconstitutional.

The Hon. H. C. Baker, in his "Manual of Authorities" for the use of the members of the Federal Convention held in Sydney in 1891, says, on page 142:—

So far as these colonies are concerned, there seems to be no objection arising either out of the form of our Government or our relations to Great Britain to prevent the adoption of the referendum.

Are members content with the Federal Constitution, when finally adopted by the Convention, to be submitted by a referendum to the people of the accepting colonies? I ask will that be unconstitutional? As a matter of fact, the question is no longer one of opinion. The principle is now operating in Australia. At the general election last year in South Australia a referendum was taken on a very important—and for parliamentary representatives, a very difficult question—namely, the question of religious education in schools.

Mr. LEIGHT: Only 16 per cent. of the electors voted.

Mr. KIDSTON: Hon. members know quite well how easily this very difficult question was settled by the referendum. It would not matter if only two voted for it.

Mr. MURRAY: The point is the referendum—not separation at all.

Mr. KIDSTON: The hon. member is quite correct. The question before the House is not separation but the question of rejection of a preceptive. It is alleged that the proposal would be unconstitutional, and I am trying to show that it would not be unconstitutional, and more than that, that the referendum does not represent a most difficult question lately in South Australia easily and effectively. It would quite as well dispose of the question of separation here. I therefore hope we shall hear no more about the proposal being unconstitutional. There are a number of other objections raised to the proposal, which I shall not refer to. I am afraid there are some personal considerations operating, and that is the reason I regret a difference of opinion with some of my colleagues on this matter, yet I think that what I am proposing will result in the wise settlement of the question involved. At the present time it is not wise or expedient to refer to personal matters, as I wish the matter to be discussed purely on its merits. It is objected that there is no necessity for this.

My hon. colleague, Mr. Curtis, said that, and that the people of Northern and Central Queensland have a hundred times proved their unanimity on the question of separation. I think, to put it mildly, that is not correct. I have a fairly full knowledge of what has been done in the matter, and while I do not want to depreciate what has been done—while I recognise the vast amount of work that has been done—yet that is somewhat overrating the case. But, admitting it is true that they have proved it a hundred times, I ask will that be constitutional? As a matter of fact, the Imperial Government have not asked us for a referendum. I would like to ask if the Imperial Government ever asked us to move in the matter at all? Did they ask for a petition to be sent home? Did they ask for a deputation to be sent home? Did they ask for memorials to be sent home to them? Why, then, is this fear expressed that we should do something that they have not asked? Why is this fear expressed lest we should do too much? It seems to me clear to the meanest understanding, from the very fact that we have not got separation, that it is a case in which all that has been done too little has yet been done, and we should go on adding proof to proof until we have built up what Mr. Chamberlain calls "an overwhelming case"—a case that will result in our getting what we want. As a matter of fact the Imperial Government do not want to be troubled by us. They simply want us to sit quiet, and so long as we are content to drag along in this way from Parliament to Parliament doing nothing because the Imperial Government do not ask us to do anything—

The Secretary for Public Instruction: Do you want them to interfere with the internal affairs of the States in Australia? What you want is Home Rule.

Mr. KIDSTON: In reply to that let me say that when the English Government gave Queensland separation from New South Wales they gave it on the distinct understanding that at some future time they would have the power of further dividing the colony. I think that is quite sufficient answer. Returning to the question as to whether there is any necessity for us doing anything further: There is no necessity for us doing this or anything else if we can sit still until the ripe plum of separation drops into our mouth; but if we are willing to do that, I can say this: we have a long time to sit still. Lord Ripon, in reply to a separationist who went home and waited on him that they did not aggregate enough, and I think that is our position. There is urgent necessity, if we are earnest, to show that we are in earnest. The only possible chance of our getting separation lies in our being in earnest, in our being active and doing something to get it. Here is a letter
Mr. J. F. Hogan, M.P., who is not a particular friend of mine, but he very strongly corroborates what I say. He says—

It cannot be too strongly impressed on all our friends in the colony that everything depends upon local residents representing Southern Queensland at home and in the Imperial Parliament. This gentleman if he cannot point to a strong and determined movement in its favour on the spot has tried to show how we can make a strong and determined effort, but if anyone can show me a better means and I am quite willing to adopt it.

Another objection is that the motion throws doubt and suspicion upon all that has been done in the past.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: A great deal more than a doubt.

Mr. Kidston: That can only be in one way. It can only throw a doubt upon what has been done in the past if the people repudiate the claim that has been made in their name, and the gentleman who made that objection showed that he recognised that was the reason he feared it would not be done. He said that the people in the remote districts would not put themselves to the trouble of recording their votes because they might not be in one way. He said that the people in the past would cast a doubt. He said that they would make a claim for separation, and the result would be that the whole thing would be discredited.

I can quite understand a man who feels that way opposing a motion proposing the referendum, but I cannot understand how such a man can make a claim for separation. If that statement is true, then I say the Imperial Government have no right to interfere. I do not believe it is true. I believe what has been said by the hon. member, Mr. Kidston; and I must say that if separation has not better friend than that hon. member I am exceedingly sorry for separation. He has told us practically that we can forward really to speak for the referendum.

Mr. Kidston: No.

Mr. Fitzgerald: That referendum settled the question at Charters Towers.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: Yes. I said there would be no expense beyond a little extra printing and paper.

Mr. Kidston: Mr. Kidston is a fervent separationist, and finished as a fervid federalist; but fully three parts of his speech concerned the referendum, and he was engaged in knocking down objections which I imagine he is chiefly responsible for. He spoke about its being unconstitutional, and we had Professor Dicey and Cardinal Newman's brother, with a number of other gentlemen whose names I do not at present remember, all going to show that the referendum was unconstitutional. Can we possibly believe that the hon. member is in earnest about separation, or federation either? That objection has never been raised, and it is strange it is raised now, seeing that this House has actually passed a resolution to submit an important question to the people of the colony for their opinion. Why should the hon. member beat the air for half-an-hour by arguing that the referendum is constitutional, or has he made separation a mere stalking-horse in order to speak of federation? One question seems entirely swallowed by the other. He reminds me of a child of mine whose cat had two kittens, and in order to save the life of one kitten it drowned the other. The hon. member began his speech by saying that other parties had played fast and loose with the subject, and that he would charge men who come to this Parliament with playing fast and loose, but if they read his speech they will in all human probability come to a conclusion different from his. Perhaps in regard to his action on the present occasion. The hon. member also said the capitalists were not sincere in their support of federation, and I think he said the Labour party were not sincere. The Secretary for Public Instruction: That is hardly the spirit in...
which to approach a question of so much importance. The weakest point with regard to his position is this, that assuming he is in earnest with regard to separation—and I have every reason to believe he is earnest and sincerely believes that the people in the North and Centre are—assuming that he is in earnest in favour of separation and was, at the time of that interview, in favour of that movement, in what way is he going to further it by this resolution? The object of a referendum is held to be to clear up some question which is disputed—to ascertain what is the opinion of the people on the question. What objection has ever been taken in this House or outside of it to separation on the score that generally, at one time or another, the great majority of the people of Northern and Central Queensland were not in favour of it? No one has set up that objection, and it was never taken in this House. Generally you may accept it as a right test that members represent the views of the majority of their constituents on subjects which have been prominently brought forward for years. For years the members representing the North were, by a vast majority, in favour of separation. It is quite true that in the Central district most of the members at one time were also in favour of it. The question was never disputed, but now the hon. member for Rockhampton comes at this period of the day—after they have gone to the foot of the Throne; after they have furnished two and possibly more petitions; after they have sent delegates home to interview the Right Hon. the Secretary for the Colonies and ask for separation; after it was admitted that the people were in favour of separation and that was never denied by the Secretary of State, why then should the hon. member now endeavour—not to prove but to ascertain the opinion of the people on the question? And this is the present sample of separation! Practically the efforts made in this House by the men of the North and Centre are reckoned as nothing. Why, at one time in this House, before we were favoured with the hon. member's presence, we had a petition signed by twenty-eight members of this House representing the North and Centre, and of the old country, asking on behalf of their constituents for separation.

Mr. Dawson: What do you deduce from that?

The Secretary for Public Instruction: I should deduce from it that there was no question as to the attitude taken up by the majority in favour of separation, if they not be consulted in favour of separation? That Cleveland is not to be consulted, that Redcliffe is not to be consulted and that Rockhampton is the foremost champion of separation! The people of Queensland at present are as one people, and you cannot take a corner or a portion of the colony, a third, or a half of the people, and ask them what shall be the future of the colony in which they live, and say that is consulting the people. That is not consulting the people, but it is to ignore, and I am not sure that it is not to insult, two-thirds of the people of the colony. Yet the hon. member comes here and tells us we must consult the people, and when he does so he takes them in the movement if they had a referendum—which those people are. Worse than that, he actually said that the people of Central Queensland would work up an interest in the movement if they had a referendum—that they would be stirred up and would show some warmth towards the movement if they had a referendum. What does all that imply? If it implies anything at all, it is that the movement is practically dead in the Central districts; and I certainly hold that the most damaging blow which has been struck at separation, at any rate in regard to the old country, has come from the hon. member for Rockhampton. One of the hon. member's arguments is that some persons in the colony are to be consulted in favour of federation; why should they not be consulted in favour of separation? I see no reason why they should not be consulted in favour of separation, if it is a fact that at present their opinions are so uncertain that we really do not know what they think. But I ask the hon. member if he cannot see that if it is necessary on behalf of the people of Northern and Central Queensland, it is equally necessary on behalf of the people of Southern Queensland. He is ignoring the people—ignoring actually a majority of the people. The people of Queensland at present are as one people, and you cannot take a corner or a portion of the colony, a third, or a half of the people, and ask them what shall be the future of the colony in which they live, and say that is consulting the people. That is not consulting the people, but it is to ignore, and I am not sure that it is not to insult, two-thirds of the people of the colony. Yet the hon. member comes here and tells us we must consult the people, and when he does so he takes them in the movement of the "three tailors of Teoley street"; he means that a fraction of the people are to be consulted. Will he say that if the people of Humbybong desire separation from the colony they alone are to be consulted and not the rest of Queensland? That Cleveland is not to be consulted, that Redcliffe is not to be consulted, that what is the business of one portion of the colony is not in any way the business of another portion of it? Does anyone suppose that if in the United Kingdom the people of Plymouth wanted separation the matter would in no way concern the rest of England? If, in America, the people of New Orleans or New York wanted separation from the rest of the States, it would be right to consult the people of New Orleans or the people of New York and to ignore the rest of the people of the United States? Would that not be ignoring the people of the United States? I say it does concern the people of Southern Queensland whether they shall remain the people of the whole colony or separate from the rest. I go further, and say that what happens in Victoria or New South Wales concerns us, and it would concern us much more if we formed a part of those States.
When he speaks of the people I should like him to use some qualification. He should either not speak of the people, or else say "all the people." One statement that the hon. member made, which bears out a portion of my contention, was that he wished to prove that the people of the North andCentre are with us. Why does he put a poster up in the hands of our enemies? Then, again, what good does he expect will accrue to the cause he represents? He cannot make it move plain than it has been made in the past. The people in those portions of the colony are in favour of separation. He cannot make it move plain to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and he must either appeal to the people of this colony, or to the people of the whole of the colonies, or to the Secretary of State. He calls himself a democrat, but he is also a socialist, and nothing can be more opposed to democracy than socialism. Therefore, I would prefer to call him an advanced radical. In a matter that concerns the people of any one of the other colonies, he says we must try to settle it before federation, because if federation takes place the future Constitution will provide that no state shall be separated without the consent of the colony as a whole. The Convention has been faithful to the referendum, but the hon. member tells us, "I object to federated Australia trying to protect the rights of the people of the separate States." He absolutely disregards the people of this colony as a whole—puts his foot upon them—tramples upon the rest ofAustralia, and then wishes to rush to Great Britain. He repudiates behaviour influenced by the prelates of Queensland as a whole, and says he will ask Mr. Joseph Chamberlain for separation—to send an armed force to the colony to enforce it, I suppose. But Joseph Chamberlain is a wiser man than the hon. member, or he would not be where he is. He is not so foolish as to employ force, and what else can be used? An overwhelming case must be made out if there is to be a re-arrangement with the creditors of the colony as a whole. If we were divided into three States, each would have to be jointly and severally responsible for the liabilities of the others. We should never get the Home authorities to interfere until such some arrangement is made. It would not be possible for the whole of the people of the Southern portion of the colony to consent that they will be willing to enter into a new contract, and endorse the promises of the other parts of the colony to pay their debts if the people of the North and Centre will endorse theirs. Therefore the first thing to do will be to get the people of the South, whom the hon. member ignores, to consent. When the Secretary of State said he would only interfere if an overwhelming case were made out, did he mean that it would be an overwhelming case if there were a mere local majority? An interference with the whole people of Queensland can only be made by the joint and severally responsible action of the Federal state of war. But the hon. member has told us—and I admire him for it—that he prefers to bayonets, and that although the people of Rockingham showed a great deal of ardour for the combat he is in favour of peace. I notice, with a great deal of admiration, that the hon. member is not prepared to push matters to extremes, and he gives credit Mr. Joseph Chamberlain with having as much discretion as he has. If Great Britain sent an armed force here, that force would he welcomed by the people of this colony as a whole, but federation will shortly be brought about. He believes that Australia will not admit Queensland into the federation against the wishes of the people of Queensland without the consent of the people. He wishes in fact to frustrate any wishes they may express. He also wishes Queensland, having entered into the Federal Convention as three States, but does he forget that it takes more than one party to make a bargain? Does he think that it would be certain that federation would be accomplished if we demanded six votes in the Senate instead of two? There has been sufficient difficulty in overcoming the objections which the large States have already raised to equal representation of the smaller States. I believe that if the hon. gentleman could by any means manage to make Queensland into three States before the end of the Convention and the establishment of the union, then in all probability he would defer that. So, if he were successful in this way he would most probably be successful only at the expense of federation, because he admits that the federal body would not permit this to be done after federation—against the wishes of the people. He wants it to be done against the wish of the people of Queensland, and he wants the States which have become so against the wish of the majority of the people of their own States have already been established, but also in all probability to cast greater difficulties in the way of the federation of Australasia.

Mr. DAWSON: It has been said that "time bringeth many changes, and association many strange opinions." The expression of opinion just given is one that has been anticipated from an hon. gentleman who had been a consistent advocate of a separation of any kind, that is, one determined to thwart separation at every turn by any means; but that it should come from a one-time ardent and enthusiastic separationist is very surprising. The whole of the hon. gentleman's argument would be fairly good, consistent, and logical if he had established the initial premise that the referendum was necessary in conflict with the question of separation. He used a number of arguments, assuming all the time that the principle of the referendum was as antagonistic to the question of separation itself; but he should have proved his premise before he tried to draw his deduction.

The Secretary of the Colonial Instruction: I never had such a premise.
Mr. DAWSOIl: Then the hon. gentleman conducted an argument without a premise, and I found one for him. He states that the introduction of this motion will tend to destroy the impression hitherto established that the people of the Southern and Central portions of the colony are in favour of separation. But that is another assumption. That impression is not established. It has been denied by the one time Premier, Sir T. McI1r11ra1th; it has been denied by the majority of the House in division that the majority of the people in North or the Centre were in favour of separation. Every time a separation motion came on, either in connection with the North or the Centre, or in connection with North and Centre combined, the attitude of the Government has been the same; they have declared that it was only a question brought up by a few enthusiasts in Townsville and Rockhampton, and that the majority of the people in the two different centres were not in favour of separation.

Mr. DAWSOIl: I remember— I think it was in 1893—the last time a very big debate took place on this question. I believe the motion was introduced by the hon. member, Mr. Curtis, and the then Premier, Sir T. McI11r11ra1th, took about four hours to reply. That was one of the biggest and most interesting debates on the subject of separation that ever took place in this House; certainly it ranked with, if it did not surpass, the debate that took place when the Hon. J. Macrossan drew up a long letter to the Secretary of State for Public Instruction. Sir Samuel Griffith brought in his Provincial Districts Bill simply because a majority were in favour of it, and we supported it. The Constitution Bill was brought in for that very reason.

Mr. DAWSOIl: I do not know. That is an after matter. That has been done in any single election since Queensland had a Parliament. The only time that ever a question of that kind was decided was in the North or the Centre. And then, if their opinion is expressed in any manner a separation motion will tend to destroy the impression of the House in division that the majority of the people in North or the Centre were in favour of separation. That is the whole object of the motion. And then, if their opinion is expressed in favour of separation, they can come with their case, not only to the Home Government, but to the people of the Southern part of the colony, and say, "Here is our opinion; here is our opinion; we ask you to assist us."

Mr. DAWSOIl: It has not been done in any single election since Queensland had a Parliament. And that is all that is asked by the hon. gentleman in connection with Charters Towers, and that was not during the time of a general election. I altogether deny that because a man stands on a public platform during the time of a general election and declares that he is a separationist, and gets elected to this House, therefore his constituents are separationists. I deny that any man has the right to assume that, because at the time of a general election there are about a dozen other questions mixed up with the question of separation, and the average voter averages the opinions expressed by the different candidates on those questions, and votes accordingly. In the election of 1898 my colleague and myself were returned to this House by an overwhelming majority—the largest number of votes polled by any two candidates in the history of Queensland. The question of separation was raised on that occasion; the separationists had a candidate running purely and simply in the interest of separation, and he was the lowest on the poll.

Mr. DAWSOIl: We he a Charters Towers man? Mr. DAWSOIl: He was an eloquent man like the hon. gentleman, but notwithstanding that he got defeated. He was well known on Charters Towers, and was taken up by a large number of influential men there. The result of that election would look as if Charters Towers was overwhelmingly against separation, but then you must remember that one of the most enthusiastic and consistent separationists that Charters Towers has known is my colleague, Mr. Dunford. He fought the battle of separation for many years, while I on the other hand had been an anti-separationist for years, and was so in 1898.

Mr. DAWSOIl: The question was never raised in 1896, but in 1893. If you are to say that because a man is a separationist and gets returned to this House his constituents are separationists, what conclusions are you to draw from the action of Charters Towers in returning a separationist and an anti-separationist? The only conclusion you can come to is that Charters Towers is both separationist and anti-separationist, and that both parties are in the majority. But you cannot determine the opinion of the electors on this question by the number of expressions of separationists that may be returned to this House during a general election, for the reason I have stated— namely, that that is not the only question to be decided by the electors at such an election. There is only one way to get at the real opinion of the people concerned, and that is by a North or the Centre. And then, if their opinion is expressed in favour of separation, they can come with their case, not only to the Home Government, but to the people of the Southern part of the colony, and say, "Here is our opinion; here is our opinion; we ask you to assist us."
Mr. DAWSON: That is no reason why we should not take the referendum. If half of the electors in the particular district concerned do not go to the poll that will reveal another fact—that half the people are indifferent about the matter; do not care two straws one way or the other, and that would be one argument against enthusiastic separationists. And if hon. members sitting on that side of the House are against separation, and they believe the referendum will prove that half of the people are indifferent about the matter, the best thing they can do is to support in a body the motion of the hon. member for Rockhampton, and make their case stronger than it is at present. I see no reason why, if the impression that the people of the North and Centre are in favour of separation is a wrong impression, it should not be destroyed. Separationists do not desire to win their case by trickery; they are prepared to stand by the truth in the matter, and the proof of that is that they are asking for a direct vote on the question. If by any means at all—by juggling, by petitions, by using public men, by using public meetings—they have created an impression in England and in the southern colonies that the people of the North and Centre are in favour of separation, while, as a matter of fact, they are not in favour of it at all, the sooner the better. If this motion will tend to destroy an untruth of that kind I shall support it. The hon. gentleman also argued that the hon. member for Rockhampton was inconsistent, inasmuch as he desired that the whole of the people of the colony should take part in the referendum on separation, but did not think that the whole of the people of the colony should take part in the referendum on Northern and Central Separation. To my mind there is no inconsistency at all, but a good deal of reason and common sense, in the attitude taken up by the hon. member for Rockhampton. The question of federation in the first instance affects the whole colony.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: Does not separation affect the whole colony?

Mr. DAWSON: Not in the first instance. When the referendum on the question as to whether we shall federate with the other colonies or not is taken, if it is in favour, it pledges the whole colony to enter into that federation, but the referendum on separation is a different thing. When you take the referendum as asked by the hon. member for Rockhampton, all that you do is to get an expression of opinion from the people of the colony as to whether they desire separation, and whether the agitation on this subject is merely the agitation of a few interested parties, and after that expression of opinion has been obtained the necessary action will have to be taken to secure separation.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: Why should not the other partner be consulted as to whether they desire it or not?

Mr. DAWSON: There is no objection at all to their being consulted, but the question is decided now is whether the people of the Centre and the North desire federation or not. If they say they desire it, then the second question will be, do the people of the South desire it, and will they permit it? But that question should only be put to the issue after the first question is decided.

Mr. Murray: Consult them all at the one time.

Mr. DAWSON: You cannot very well consult them all at the one time.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: Why not? It is a general election.

Mr. DAWSON: No, it is not, and in consulting them all at the one time you would merely confuse the issue without getting any clear judgment brought to bear on the question. If the people of the South desire to give a vote in the first instance, I have no objection to their doing that, always remembering that when the vote is given the boundaries are clearly drawn so that the general public may know who are the voters in the South, and who are the voters in the North and Centre.

The Secretary for Public Instruction: If the boundaries are not drawn, how can they know what they do desire? I object to the proposed boundaries, anyway.

Mr. DAWSON: Quite so. I believe that if Central separation comes off, the back country within twenty miles of Mackay will be included in the Central colony, and that is an objection from the point of view of the hon. gentleman. But we are not now discussing the question of boundaries or even the question of separation. The only thing before us is whether the people desire it or not. I wish hon. members to keep prominently before their minds the distinction that I have drawn between the real case and the supposed case put before the House by the Secretary for Public Instruction. If that is done, I do not think that one simple case and which would lead any reasonable and sensible man to say that this motion should not be supported. I may say here, if the vote is taken, that I am very sorry to see that the hon. gentleman in charge of the Education Department is going further and further from the logical position that he took up in this House for some years; and that he is cultivating a faculty for seeing distinctions between things that are not different.

Mr. CURTIS: Bearing in mind the continuous unanimity of the people of Central Queensland in favour of separation ever since the initiation of the movement nine years ago, and bearing in mind the fact that that unanimity has been acknowledged by the present Government of Queensland and by the Imperial Government, I cannot persuade myself that the hon. member who has moved this motion really expects the House will take it seriously. If the proposal means anything at all, it means that the hon. member asks the House to affirm the desirability of taking steps to ascertain something that has already been ascertained and admitted. The motion can be taken as serious only so far as it asks this House to take certain action which would practically have the effect of introducing into the colony the principle of the referendum, and which is very evident from the speech of the mover of the resolution that he is very much concerned about the introduction of the referendum than he is about separation itself. He does not ask the House to affirm the desirability of separation or otherwise—he simply asks us to commit ourselves to the referendum.

Mr. HARDCASTLE: He asks us to disapprove of Sir Thomas McIlwraith's despatch.

Mr. CURTIS: Sir Thomas McIlwraith is not here now—he is not the head of the Government, and many things have happened since then. Last year the present Premier, when moving the second reading of the Federal Enabling Bill, unequivocally recognised the unanimity of the people of Central and Northern Queensland on this question of separation, and he proposed to divide the colony into three parts for the better purposes of that Bill. After that, there can be no need to dispute as to whether the people of Central and Northern Queensland require self-government or not. That has been proved with the hilt, and I am very sorry that the senior member for Rockhampton has seen fit to again bring forward a proposition which casts discredit and doubt upon the whole matter.

Mr. KERR: Are you afraid of the referendum?
Northern and [23 September.] Central Separation. 941

Mr. CURTIS: I am not afraid of it, but I do not see any necessity for it. Besides, I do not see that there is much probability of the hon. member carrying his motion; and if he has no chance of carrying it he should not have introduced it, because, if it is not carried, it leaves a doubt as to the position of the hon. member who has introduced it.

I can speak with some authority as to the unaniity of the people of Central Queensland. I am the acknowledged leader of the Central and Northern Separation League, which was established some nine years ago. This body carried on this movement from its inception without the assistance of the chairman of the hon. member, and one very grave objection to agreeing to this motion forward without the approbation of the people of Central Queensland, which took place last session saying that the people were not satisfied with it that they signed a strongly worded letter to Lord Ripon, which I had the honour of drafting. Seven of those gentlemen are still in the House, and three others—the mover of the motion, the member for Rockhampton North, and the member for 3 far as separation was concerned. I cannot forget these facts, and I say the hon. member had no right to accuse hon. members on this side of backing and filling and fiddling with this subject. If he and his friends had succeeded in carrying their motion it would have struck a death-blow at separation for many years, but fortunately they were unable to carry it. Subsequently, both the hon. members I have named became ardent separationists—just previous to the election of 1893. The hon. member is seemingly now very anxious to patronise the question, but, bearing in mind his previous action, his patronage reminds me of the man who looks on with unconcern while another man is struggling for his life, and when he reaches dry land embarrasses him with his help. That seems the kind of assistance which the hon. member is desirous of giving to the separation movement. Members opposite spoke and voted for the motion, and were so satisfied with it that they signed a strongly worded letter to Lord Ripon, which I had the honour of drafting. Seven of those gentlemen are still in the House, and three others—the mover of the motion, the member for Rockhampton North, and the member for—have been since returned as pledged to Central separation. The unanimity of the people was again affirmed in November, 1893, and unless hon. members think that a change has taken over the people, they have no right to bring forward a motion of this kind. I look upon the action of the hon. member in having brought forward this motion without first having secured the consent of the Central members as most unwarrantable, more especially as the league in Rockhampton—the men who have done the work, who have carried on the crusade during the last nine years, have found the sinews of war, have spent thousands of pounds in the movement, and are, in fact, opposed to the motion. To show that I will read a telegram I have received on the subject. This is a matter on which I feel most strongly because I have a deep interest in it. I have made great sacrifices for it. I have spoken repeatedly and written in favour of it, and, in addition, I am probably the largest subscriber to the movement in Central Queensland.

This is the telegram I have received—

At a well attended meeting of members of the League held at Rockhampton the following motion was carried unanimously:—That the action about to be taken by Mr. Kitchon in the Legislative Assembly on Thursday night, is, in the opinion of this committee, both unnecessary and undesirable, and calculated to injure the cause of separation.

Mr. KITSON: Who wrote the letter asking for that meeting to be called?

Mr. CURTIS: I say the hon. member has incurred a grave responsibility in bringing this motion forward without the approval of the Central and Northern members. He who has not only consulted the Central members, but the Northern members too. Last year the hon. member brought forward a similar motion. I consider that this is a false step, because it would be fatal to the movement to have to wait nearly two
years before the referendum could be held at the next general election, and meantime much discredit would be thrown on the whole business. I believe our friends in England, Mr. Hogan and others, would be much disgusted by the carrying of such a motion, because it would indicate that we did not know our own minds. In addition to that there are grave objections to the principle of the referendum being introduced into this colony. I quoted last year on that subject a very distinguished authority who wrote in the Century Magazine. I will not repeat those quotations, but I will give one or two more because this is a referendum motion and not a separation motion at all. The quotations I made last year are in Howard, and I will not repeat them, but here is another extract from the same article—

The direct, logical, and sure remedy is at hand. Representative government does not need to be abandoned, but to be put in the hands of better men. If all citizens do their duty and see to it that only fit men are sent to the legislature, we shall be in no need of a referendum or of any other revision to primitive governmental methods to save us from the consequences of our own indifference and neglect of civic duties.

I recontest the hon. member for Rockhampton again in contemptuous terms of that authority, so I will give him another—the late President of the Swiss Republic, Numa Droz, who has recently been appointed Governor of Ceted by the Great Powers. After speaking of the way in which the referendum operates in Switzerland, he goes on to say—

But every medal has its reverse side. The fear of the referendum tends to make timid legislators, who sometimes lack the courage to vote for what they believe to be the best for the country, or, having voted for it, to be afraid of it before their fellow-citizens; they prefer to let it go without a struggle. The referendum has also given birth to a panorama of politicians who exploit the credulity or passions of the populace in order to oppose measures which are perfectly legitimate.

Further on he says—

From the moment that the regular representatives of the people are placed in such a position that they have no power to say in the matter as an irresponsible committee, that might be raised up in a popular posture, it is clear that the limits of sound democracy have been passed, and that the reign of democracy has begun. The people have no other safeguard than their own good sense. The good sense of the Swiss people is certainly very great; but I am conscious against moments of sudden excitement or of unreflecting passion, when the bounds of reason and justice may again be overstepped, as in the case of the Jewish slaughter-house regulations?

Finally the writer says—

I think, indeed, that I have sufficiently shown that, for the reasons I have here developed, the referendum and the initiative in Switzerland form part of a system of government of which all the pieces hang together. It appears to me very doubtful whether it would be possible to introduce these two institutions elsewhere without at the same time introducing a mechanism of government similar to that of which they have become part and parcel here.

The introduction of the referendum means the abdication of representative government in favour of direct government by the people. Mr. Kingston: And a very good thing too.

Mr. Curtis: The greatest authorities in the world on the subject show conclusively that it would not be a good thing. I will read another passage from the article in the Century Magazine, from which I have already quoted previously—

The proposition amounts practically to one for the abandonment of representative government, and a return to pure democracy, or government by town meeting.

The writer then quotes the opinion of Chief Justice Ruggles, who wrote—

I regard it as an unwise and unsound policy, calculated to lead to loose and improvident legislation, and to take away from the legislator all just sense of his high and enduring responsibility to his constituents and to posterity by shifting that responsibility upon others.

The writer himself goes on to say—

To adopt the referendum is to hand back to the people certain powers which they have delegated, and to revert to the problems of direct legislation by a democracy—a problem which was abandoned as insoluble when representative government was established.

If the Central and Northern members cannot speak in the Parliament of the colony on behalf of the electors who sent them there they acknowledge that representative government is a failure, and I am not prepared to admit that it is a failure.

Mr. McDonald: You are only one.

Mr. Curtis: I know; but I am quoting from the very highest authorities on the subject.

And I would like to draw attention to this fact in support of my contention, that the combined wisdom of all Australia at the Convention sitting in Sydney the other day, after a prolonged deliberation on the subject, finally abandoned the idea of grafting the referendum on the Constitution, even for the settlement of direct measures.

Mr. Kingston: And yet the Constitution itself is to be submitted to the referendum.

Mr. Curtis: Supposing this motion is carried and given effect to, the Central and Northern members could never again speak authoritatively as to the mind of Northern and Central Queensland. In a very short time it might be alleged by some one in the House that a change had come over the mind of those people, and that they were no longer in favour of separation, and they would demand that another referendum be taken to find out whether that was so or not. If hon. members doubt the verdict of the Central and the North at the last election on this particular question, why do they not doubt about the one man one vote, the abolition of the Upper House, the formation of a Labour department, and the abolition of the House that ended? Why do they single out this unfortunate question of separation? If they are in doubt as to the wishes of the electors on the subject of separation, why can they not answer on that point if they are right on those other questions? This is a non-contentious matter as far as the North and the Centre are concerned. The difficulty of the last five or six years would be to find a man in those districts who was not in favour of it. All the others are contentious questions, as to which there is far more reason for doubt. The fact that they have signed out this question alone has a distinctly suspicious look about it which I do not like. Remembering as I do the distinctly antagonistic attitude the hon. member has shown from time to time on this question at Rockhampton, and also that neither he nor his friends have ever subscribed a single sixpence towards the fund—which, after all, is the true test of sincerity—I have every reason to feel suspicious. After what the hon. member stated at his meeting in Rockhampton that "I never had any idea of consulting Curtis," I did not expect him to consult me on this occasion, notwithstanding the fact that I am the practical leader of the movement here. On this point, I did not expect even that he would condescend to recognise the league, although it has been recognised by the Governor, by the Government, and by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. I suppose it would be beneath his dignity to recognise that duly organised and influential body of Rockhampton gentlemen who, as I said before,
conceived and carried on this movement from its inception with great success in the face of great difficulties. It was solicited by the Labour party at one time. I remember George Taylor saying then, 'they going to support separation; they were in a majority, and would not have it. They were not willing to throw in their lot with us unless we bought their support. We did not get their support, but when it suited their purpose they came over to us all the same. I say the league had a right to be consulted before a motion of this kind was brought forward. The hon. member relies on the fact that I talked about something of this kind in 1893. So I did, but fortunately I declared against the principle of the referendum at Rockhampton in 1893. I said it might work very well in small, self-contained countries like Switzerland, but not in a vast sparsely populated territory like Queensland. I was induced to contemplate the idea of bringing such a motion forward because of an understanding I had come to with Mr. Charles Piers as then leader of the Opposition. He was willing to give his adherence to territorial separation on certain conditions, one of which was that a referendum should be taken. I was not willing to give any judgment to that extent, not because I believed in it, but because he was willing to help us to get separation. But he is not here now, and I am no longer bound by any arrangement to that effect.

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN: They would be in the same difficulty, and the hon. member for Rockhampton would not vote for separation, but for the referendum, if he were in a majority, and would not have been obliged, following the wishes of their constituents, to vote against Central separation.

Further on we also say this—

We submit that it is now ripe for speedy settlement; that the time has arrived when the Imperial Parliament or the Imperial Government should no longer be giving effect to the prayer of the petition of Her Majesty's loyal subjects, the people of Central Queensland.

And in the letter which I had the honour of drawing up, addressed to Mr. Chamberlain in September, 1895, there is this—

The results of that election are known to the Colonial Office. The question put before the electors was that of territorial separation, and with the result that out of the eleven members for the division were elected on their pledges to support the proposition to this effect and very willing of the people for self-government; the south seat was contested, an informal nomination preventing a contested election.

It concludes with a passage to this effect—

In October following, says the letter, February 19, 1894, a convention of delegates from all parts of Central Queensland assembled in Rockhampton, and adopted an address to the Secretary of State affirming the absolute necessity of separation, and submitting a further statement of our case.

Seven of the members who signed that are in the House now; the other three have been replaced by the hon. member for Rockhampton, Mr. Kidston, the hon. member for Rockhampton North, and the hon. member for Mitchell, and I do not suppose that any one of them is prepared to go back on the statements made in these letters. Nothing has occurred since then to justify them in the attitude they assume now, and why then have we such a proposal as this? I ask the hon. member why, instead of bringing forward a motion of this sort, which is mainly to get at a referendum, did he not bring forward a straight-forward motion asking the House to affirm the desirability of separation? I can suggest a reason: It is that perhaps the hon. member has changed his opinion, and is no longer in favour of separation.

MEMBERS OF THE LABOUR PARTY: Oh, oh! Mr. CURTIS: I should not be so surprised, considering his wobbling. Perhaps there is another reason for it, and that is that he knows perfectly well that the leader of his party and the Southern members of the party are not in favour of separation, and would not vote for it. They will vote, not for separation, but for the referendum, and I say this is a subterfuge. The hon. member is afraid to bring on a straightforward motion on the subject, because he knows they will not stand to him on the question of territorial separation. Is it likely they would? Can we not see the result so far as Mr. Glassey and the Southern Labour members are concerned? They would be in the same difficulty if we had federation in this colony of the three States—they would lose in this Parliament the support of the Centre and Northern members. The leader of the Labour party would lose his following to a certain extent, and is it likely that he is going to support such a proposal, knowing, as he does, that it would reduce the strength of his party in this House? That is one reason why the hon. member has not the courage to challenge the opinion of the House on the subject.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: What happened when Mr. Powers proposed it?
Mr. CURTIS: Mr. Powers had the courage of his opinion in that matter, and he dealt with the matter in a reasonable way to which I had no objection. But Mr. Powers is no longer here, and because I have moved the subject now I speak from a point of three centuries ago said that the result of all our boasted knowledge was to know how little really can be known. I say that the duty of the Central and Northern members to speak for the people of Central and Northern Queensland, and I am going to give them an opportunity of doing it. Before doing so I should like to reply to one or two of the arguments advanced by the Hon. Secretary for Public Instruction. I certainly do not agree with him that it is necessary to consult the people of Southern Queensland on this question. I distinctly repudiate such an argument, and to show its absurdity I point out that, if the ports of Moreton Bay or Port Phillip had imposed upon them a condition precedent to granting them self-government that they should obtain the consent of the majority of the people of New South Wales they would never have got it. I say that Northern and Central Queensland are offshoots from the mother colony; two separate and distinct communities entitled by absolute right to manage their own affairs, and this Parliament has no jurisdiction in the matter. I distinctly adhere to that, and I know I am right. I say it would be an advantage to Southern Queensland. Who can say that New South Wales has not distinctly benefited by the separation of Port Phillip and Moreton Bay? And who supposes for a moment that if this vast territory had remained a portion of the mother colony we would have seen anything like the development of the resources that to our place already? From the experience then of the past we have every right to expect that the separation of Northern and Central Queensland from Southern Queensland would be followed by beneficial results to the whole country. I firmly believe it would. I am perfectly satisfied that no one will ever have acquired title to Northern Queensland unless he pledges himself to advocate separation. With regard to the clause in the Constitution Bill which has been referred to, I am not acquainted with its history, but I had the honour of sending down a memorial signed by myself on behalf of the Separation League to the Convention at Adelaide, which dealt with the question of an excuse for bringing forward a motion of resolution. The motion was not carried, but I have always entertained the belief that such a clause would be put in the Federation Act—not the only competent authority to do so—requiring a referendum upon such a question. (2) Because the procedure required by the Imperial Act for the better government of the Australian colonies has been carefully followed, and a direct expression of opinion has already been given by the petitions of the adult men and women of the whole country. In conclusion, as this is a most important matter and a matter of serious question, under different headings, my reasons for voting against the motion: (1) Because no law has been enacted by the Imperial Parliament which deals with the whole subject. It was presented by Mr. Walker, of New South Wales, and was received, read, and placed upon the records. The prayer of that memorial did not ask the Convention to alter the restrictive clause, because I knew perfectly well that there was no use in asking the other colonics to put the power into the hands of the Federal Parliament to divide a colony whenever it likes; but what was suggested was that special provision should be made in our case, seeing that our claims have been acknowledged and that our agitation has been carried on for years. Unless we can get some satisfactory provision inserted in the Enabling Bill we believe we go through the Convention without the Central and Northern members ought to block the whole thing. What are we to do in the meantime? Will the referendum prevent anything from being done? What is to represent us? Will the mere taking of a vote prevent this Parliament from doing what it likes? We represent the people of Queensland, and it is our duty to represent them here. I believe that when the Enabling Bill is introduced here it will contain a provision dividing the colony into three electorates, and I also think there will be a clause providing that the draft Constitution will come back to this Parliament before it is finally sent to the people, and it will then be the duty of the separationists to protest the introduction of the Central and Northern clause.

Mr. GROOM: It goes direct to the people in the other colonies.

Mr. CURTIS: Very well. If the Enabling Bill to be introduced for the sake of the members of the Central and Northern members will have to stand shoulder to shoulder, and take care of the interests of their districts. The prayer in our memorial was simply this—

That a clause in the Commonwealth Bill of 1891 contains the provision that subsequent to the passing of the Act of Union no State shall be subdivided, except with the sanction of the Parliament of that State; and your memorialists have reason to apprehend that the same provision will be contained in the Constitution Bill of the Convention.

That as an act of simple justice your memorialists therefore pray that provision may be made in the Constitution Bill of the Convention for the admission of the present colony of Queensland into the Federation as three separate autonomous provinces or States.

We shall try to protect ourselves before we go down there, but this motion is calculated to split up and divide the members for Central and Northern Queensland. If the hon. member desired to aim a blow at the cause of separation he could not have gone about it in a more effective way, and I am entirely opposed to it, because unanimity on the part of hon. members is essential. If adopted it can only prove what has been already proved up to the hilt. No doubt can exist as to the unanimity of the people after the unemployed and unequivalently acknowledged by the Premier in the House last year. In moving the second reading of the Enabling Bill he said—

Take the Northern and Central districts. We all know that they have a perfectly legitimate aspiration—that they are looking forward to the day when they will be formed into separate States. Why should they not? But if the whole colony is made into one electorate, I should like to know where they will be. It seems to me that it is the electors who will be left out in the cold altogether. I protest that they shall of necessity be represented at the Convention in the way submitted in the Bill—that is to say, by dividing the colony into three electorates, each sending its own returns to the Central and Northern electorates. After that I do not see that there can be a shadow of an excuse for bringing forward a motion of this character. In conclusion, as this is a most important matter and a matter of serious question, under different headings, my reasons for voting against the motion: (1) Because no law has been enacted by the Imperial Parliament which deals with the whole subject.

Mr. CURTIS: I have already given the reason for voting against the motion. (2) Because the procedure required by the Imperial Act for the better government of the Australian colonies has been carefully followed, and a direct expression of opinion has already been given by the petitions of the adult men and women of the whole country.
or our unanimity, but, on the contrary, the reply we have received distinctly recognises it, and no counter petition has ever been presented. (7) Because it is for the members to take the elecitors for the House in their own Parliament.

(8) Because this Premier of the colony, when introducing the Enabling Bill last year, distinctly admitted the claims and unanimity of the people of Central and Northern Queensland. When the Secretary of State speaks of an overwhelming case he wants proof that we are unable to come to an agreement with the people here, but as I have said before, a thing of this kind cannot be carried on without money, and when I held a meeting in Rockhampton the night before the hon. member for Bundoora was to address the electors of Central Queensland I mentioned the subject of separation, and said I hoped the hon. member would give a definite and unequivocal expression of opinion, more especially as he expected to get some more representatives behind him from Central Queensland. I invited him and his party to put their hands in their pockets and subscribe to enable us to carry on the work, but so far I have not received a single sixpence. If the Labour party were in earnest about this matter and desire to help us to bring it to a successful issue, let them put their hands in their pockets and subscribe to the league. That will be a material assistance. It has not been the large capitalists who have found the money, but the small property owners in Rockhampton and the Central district generally. Some of them were very poor men, but they subscribed their five shillings now and again. I have always declared myself opposed to the incorporation of Queensland in the federal union as one State, and shall continue to do all in my power to first bring about a tripartite division of the colony by means of territorial separation, or by any other means; and it is the duty of the Central and Northern members to speak for the people in their own Parliament, and show their unanimity on the question. I therefore propose to move an amendment which I invite those members on both sides to support. It does not matter if all the Southern members vote against it; so long as the large majority of the Central and Northern members support it. I shall be satisfied. My amendment will be consistent with my action, because I have always maintained that territorial separation should take place prior to federation, and I am maintained in that by the opinion of no less an authority than the late Sir Henry Parkes, who in several of his speeches, and in his book by Way of Story, fully speaking of federation, distinctly stated that it would be far better for the union of the Australian States to be inaugurated by twenty or more States than with only five or six in order to secure the ultimate equality of federal power. The Centre, as compared with the South of Queensland, is weak; and the North up to the present has not co-operated with the Centre to the extent it ought to have done, or we would have secured territorial separation before this. If the discussion on this House was held in Ipswich, and I may say, from what I know of the South central part of the colony then, and from what I know of the Northern part of the colony now, that separation was a good and proper thing for Queensland as a whole, at that time, so separation will now be a very good thing for Northern Queensland. I do not know so much about the Central division, but I am certain that separation will improve Northern Queensland. We do not want every time we have any little thing to do to have to come to Brisbane. We want the right to spend our own money and to manage our own affairs. We have children whom we want to put into positions, but at present when anyone is wanted for a position in the North after the word "House" be left out with a view of inserting the following words—

The time has now arrived when the Central and Northern divisions of the colony should be constituted separate colonies, in compliance with the petitions of the inhabitants thereof.

2. That this resolution be presented to His Excellency the Governor for transmission to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the usual way.

Now the House has got something tangible to vote upon—a straight-out issue. Though the adoption of this amendment will not immediately secure territorial separation, it will strengthen the position we intend to take up in connection with the proposal to incorporate Queensland into a federal union with the other colonies when the Bill comes before us. I attribute the greatest importance to the statement made by Sir Hugh Nelson last year in moving the second reading of the Bill to which I have called attention, because he spoke of the aspirations of the people as legitimate aspirations which he believed would be realised. There could be no more distinct and satisfactory acknowledgment than that on the part of the Government of Queensland, because when the Premier spoke last year it was on behalf of the Government; and I venture to say that there is not a single member of the Government who will not confirm the statement that there is not the slightest doubt as to the very natural desire on the part of the people of Central and Northern Queensland to secure their birthright; that is, the management of their own affairs. The Act to provide for the better government of the Australian colonies prescribes the mode of procedure to be followed by any community desiring to secure self-government, to be separated, to be endowed with their birthright. That procedure has been followed in the case of Central and Northern Queensland, as I have already shown; and I beg to move the amendment which I have read to the House.

Mr. CASTLING: I think the hon. member has done the correct thing in proposing this amendment, and trying to get Northern and Central members to work together as far as this question is concerned. Last year the senior member for Rockhampton brought in a similar motion, but he did not attempt to bring us together. He spoke to members on his own side of the House, but he did not speak to members on this side until the day before the discussion came on. If he was in earnest on the matter of separation, would he not have tried to bring together Northern and Central members on both sides of the House? No matter how much we may differ on other questions, surely on a question like this we should be prepared to waive our differences for the common good of the Central and Northern parts of the colony. I hope the real issue on this question will not be clogged by the referendum or anything else. The members for the North are pledged to separation. At least I am, and I believe others are in the same position. I was in the South when the first separation meeting was held in Ipswich, and I may say, from what I know of the Northern part of the colony then, and from what I know of the Northern part of the colony now, that separation was a good and proper thing for Queensland as a whole, at that time, so separation will now be a very good thing for Northern Queensland. I do not know so much about the Central division, but I am certain that separation will improve Northern Queensland. We do not want every time we have any little thing to do to have to come to Brisbane. We want the right to spend our own money and to manage our own affairs. We have children whom we want to put into positions, but at present when anyone is wanted for a position in the North 1897-3
someone is sent up from the South. I hope we shall stick to this agitation until we get what is our right. I know that people down here say that separation is dead, but it is not, nor is it likely to die. It is said that it is the unexpected that happens, and although a great many Southern people say that separation is dead, still I believe that we shall have separation, pure and simple for the North, and I hope also for Central Queensland. I beg to second the amendment.

Mr. HARDacre: I think it is a most regrettable thing that the so-called leader of the Central separation movement should take action of this kind on a motion that simply proposes to send the question of separation to the people for objecting to the motion that the hon. member did consult those hon. members; that he sent circulars to them asking them if they would support his motion, and also if they had any suggestions to offer in regard to the matter.

Mr. MURRAY: He never consulted them as to the wisdom of bringing it forward at all.

Mr. Curtis: He said he was going to bring it forward.

Mr. HARDacre: I am informed that the hon. member for Rockhampton intimated to his colleague, Mr. Curtis, that he would postpone his motion if the hon. member had any suggestions to offer, and that he did all in his power to secure the assistance of the members opposite. Then what is the reason that they oppose this motion? Simply because they are not in favour of the particular member who has proposed it; it is purely a matter of personal grievance, a matter of pique or rivalry between the leader of the Central separation movement and the hon. member for Rockhampton. It will be impossible to get a vote on both the motion and the amendment tonight, and I do not think we should go to a vote either without full discussion on the subject. I therefore hope that hon. members will allow the matter to be placed on the business-paper for an early date, and with that object in view I move the adjournment of the debate.

Question—That the debate be adjourned—put and passed; and resumption of the debate made an Order of the Day for the 22nd October.

ACTING CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES.

The ACTING TREASURER moved that Mr. Grimes, the member for Oxley, take the chair in the absence of the Chairman of Committees.

Question put and passed.

LOCAL WORKS LOANS ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

LEAVE TO INTRODUCE.

On the motion of Mr. BELL, the House, in committee, affirmed the desirability of introducing this Bill; and the resolution was subsequently adopted by the House.

At 7 o'clock, the House, in accordance with Senatorial Order, proceeded with Government business.

LAND BILL.

SECOND READING—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

Mr. KIDSTON: I have no hope of saying anything new or original on this question after the lengthy debate that has already taken place. It is not because I had anything particular to say that I moved the adjournment of the debate, as the few words I have to say could just as well have been said that night, but I thought it was the desire of the House that we should adjourn at that time. I just propose to refer to a matter provided for in subdivision II. of Part VI. of the Bill, under which the revision of the Act of 1886 is to be continued. This gives the Secretary for Lands power to sell up to 100,000 acres in each year, and the people I represent, and I believe the people of the whole Central district, are unanimously of the opinion that it is an evil thing—or at least for our district—that such a practice should be continued. Many people in our district who are not opposed to the principle of giving the land in freehold recognize that the prosperity and future advancement of our district will be retarded by this policy of selling large areas of the public lands. I cannot help thinking that the South—where large areas of land have been sold in the past—feels something like the fox in the fable, who, when he got his own tail cut off, tried to persuade all his companions that the proper thing was for them to get their tails cut off. A very great mistake has been made in parting with the public estate in the South, and the people in that district now find that it has blocked settlement, and continues to block settlement. They have been compelled to buy back some of these areas at largely enhanced prices for the purpose of securing settlement, and yet the Government is continuing the same policy; and that policy, if continued, will bear the very same fruits in our district that it has borne in the South. We have therefore very strong and valid objections to urge against the proposal to carry on the same policy under this Bill. Moreover, a very expensive and very capable commission was appointed, and the recommendations of that commission on a matter of this sort should have been a guide to the Minister when framing this Bill. It is notable how few of the recommendations of the Lands Commission have been adopted. This one—on a most important part of our land policy—has been entirely ignored. In paragraph 48 of their report the commission say—

Your commissioners are of the opinion that the practice of alienating large areas of Western lands at public auction is a proceeding which receives no justification either from the experience of the past or from the conditions of the present time.

It seems to me that, having appointed that commission, some little regard might have been paid to their findings on such a very important matter, or the Secretary for Lands should have attempted to show the House why he disregarded so clear and positive an injunction.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Injunction?

Mr. KIDSTON: Well, so clear and positive a recommendation. If the recommendations of the commission were not to be taken, without any reason given for their rejection, I cannot see why it should have been appointed.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Were they appointed to dictate to the House or to give advice?

Mr. KIDSTON: So far as selling land is concerned at present, I recognize that the Minister cannot help himself. He has to carry out the law as it stands, and, if the exigencies of the Treasury require him to sell land, it is his duty to sell it. I suppose—strong as my objections are to the sale of land—that if I were in the position of the hon. gentleman I would be compelled to do just what he is doing, and I do not particularly blame him for what he is doing. But at a previous time the hon. gentleman was strongly opposed to the sale of land. In.
Mr. TULLEY: Was he Minister then?

Mr. KIDSTON: He was not Minister then; secondly, he has never been.

The Secretary for Public Lands: I expect I said more than you have stated. Are there no qualifications?

Mr. KIDSTON: Perhaps it would be better if I read the whole of what the hon. gentleman said.

Mr. Foxton said he was one of those who were opposed to the sale of land in any shape or form, and he had hailed the amendment when it was proposed by the hon. member for Cunningham with very great satisfaction. It might be within the recollection of hon. members that he had proposed to go further than that hon. member, and had proposed the omission of the word "permanent" from the amendment in order to provide a further restriction upon the sale land.

I do not think there is any doubt that the hon. gentleman expressed himself at that time as opposed to the sale of land in any shape or form, and he had hailed the amendment when it was proposed by the hon. member for Cunningham with very great satisfaction.

I am well aware that there is no possibility of stopping the sale of land in large areas so long as the Treasury looks to the Lands Department for a certain amount of revenue, and Parliament will have to recognise that if this source of revenue is cut off another means of filling the Treasury must be found. I would call the attention of those hon. members who are opposed to direct taxation to the utter futility of pretending to oppose the sale of land in large areas, because it is manifest to anyone that if the sale of land is to be stopped it necessarily means the imposition of a considerable amount of indirect taxation. I shall, of course, support the second reading of the Bill, because it is a good Bill in many ways, and even if it was debated on its second reading we would just be where we are, so far as the sale of the Western lands is concerned. At the same time I hope a very determined effort will be made by those hon. members who are opposed to the sale of these lands to have the Bill amended in committee. I would like to say a word now on the question of pastoral rents. There is a very difficult question, and when such authorities as the hon. members for Bullool and Lockyer disagree it is hardly for me to give a very decided opinion. It seems to me that the pastoral tenants have not a great deal to cry out about. In spite of the increase of rents since 1884 the produce of the land has increased very much, so that they are paying now only about half of the proportion of the produce that they were paying then. Taking the exports of six or seven of the main pastoral products, I find that in 1884 the pastoral rents amounted to 12½ per cent. of the pastoral produce, and in 1886 the rents only amounted to 6½ per cent. in value of the produce.

The Secretary for Public Lands: What were the items?

Mr. KIDSTON: Hides and skins, meats from the butcher, wool, tallow, and greasy, and live stock. The value of the exports in those articles amounted in 1884 to £2,110,200, and the rents received at that time amounted to £299,291. In 1886 the class of goods the exports amounted to £30,583,081. That is the export value at the port of departure, and it seems to me clear that as high there may be instances of excessively high rents, on the whole the pastoral tenants have no reason to cry out. I have not the slightest desire to do anything at all to injure the landlords of the Crown. I recognise to what a large extent the general prosperity of the colony depends upon their prosperity. At the same time so far as rent is concerned they are better off than they were. There is another small matter I will refer to. It is to another disregarded recommendation of the Lands Commission. In section 47 of their report they say—

During their extended visit to different parts of the colony your commissioners induced their attention called to the small accommodation afforded at the provincial land offices for the display of maps, and also to the want of full and accurate information regarding all lands open for selection in the different land districts of the colony. Your commissioners are of opinion that if the information supplied to the various land agents of the colony respecting lands open for selection should be on the most extensive and liberal scale, it should contain full descriptions of all classes of land open for selection.

And Mr. Murray, in the rider he added to the majority report of the commission, said that a large measure of decentralisation was necessary if the business of the Lands Office was to be well administered.

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Mr. KIDSTON: It ought to be done in some way.

The Secretary for Public Lands: How do you know it has not?

Mr. KIDSTON: I will show the hon. gentleman that it has not. I have here a letter, dated the 17th September, from a business man in Rockhampton, in which he tells me that he was called upon by an old selector, who had been there thirty-five years in the district, and had been a selector most of that time. This selector found his selection too small for him. He wished to take up a grazing farm of 2,500 acres on the resumed area of Tipal or Canal Creek run, so as to send one of his sons to carry it with a small mob of cattle, but he could get no information as to the whereabouts of any land or any assistance whatever.

Mr. KIDSTON: It affects the Bill in this way: It shows that after all the talk about promoting settlement it does not matter what Bill we pass if we do not go on with the administration of the department in this way no betterment will result.

Mr. CURTIS: In the first place, I desire to say that I think the Minister for Lands has done his best to interest the Bill, that will give general satisfaction and promote the welfare of the colony as a whole. I listened attentively to his speech last session, and I think he read the opening reading of the Bill he introduced then, and also to the speech he delivered on this occasion; and I was impressed with the conviction that he had a large knowledge of the lands of the Crown. I recognise to what a large extent the general prosperity of the colony depends upon their prosperity. At the same time so far as rent is concerned they are better off than they were. There is another small matter I will refer to. It is to another disregarded recommendation of the Lands Commission. In section 47 of their report they say—

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this is a question of the very first importance. But it is also evident that although the Bill may be a very good one, it would be impossible, if it were extended to the immense area of the colony, and the great diversity of its soil, climate, and other conditions, to deal satisfactorily with every branch of the subject in one measure. There is a great deal of force in the contention of Mr. Armstrong, one of the Land Commissioners, in his rider attached to the report, that, having regard to those facts I have mentioned, it would be impossible to deal satisfactorily with the whole subject in any one measure of general application; and I feel persuaded that if the three divisions of the colony were legislating separately upon it there would be a considerable divergence in their respective land laws. Due allowance would be made in each for the varying conditions. For instance, a land law which would be eminently suited for one area, and very good for another, would not be suitable for Central Queensland. However, notwithstanding that it is satisfactory to find the commissioners saying that during their travels over a large extent of territory they had not met with any very large number of complaints as to the land laws generally, or as to the administration of them, with the exception of the delays that took place. Instead of the inconvenience which caused owing to the absence of surveyors. That complaint was borne out the other day by the statement of the hon. member, Mr. Groom, as to the immense amount of work that had accumulated at the head office during the absence of the board in other parts of the colony. No one could appreciate while the land laws may be, inconvenience and delay will be always caused if there is not a sufficient survey staff to do the necessary work before people can get on the land. This Bill does not make any great alteration in the existing law with respect to country inside the scheduled area, or at present under the Land Act of 1884, with the exception of any selection that may be taken up in the future, and the proposal to substitute a Land Court for a Land Board. As to whether the tribunal proposed to be established will be better than the present one, I am not prepared to give an opinion. That will have to be thoroughly proved in committees, when we get there. It is very satisfactory to find Central Queensland with respect to our land laws the commission report that no change is considered necessary by the province. With respect to the provision to give priority to those who will reside on grazing farms, I think it a most excellent provision. We should do all in our power to encourage residential settlement, which is the most valuable class of settlement. It is better that we should have twenty grazing farmers rooted to the soil by family ties than that we should have one vast holding, occupying an immense area of country, the owners of which are absentees and cannot take a very large amount of interest in the colony. I am very glad to see as the commissioners certify to the genuine demand for grazing farms, and the recommendations they make with respect to that class of settlement are worthy of the best consideration. With respect to the matter of sealed tenders as opposed to auction; I am inclined to think it should have a trial. I understand that the ballot system as far as has not proved entirely satisfactory; it has not, at all events, prevented a large number of clasping applications, which have not given satisfaction. I am not inclined to think the auction system desirable, because under it the man with most money has certainly the best chance. In addition to that, while a man is not likely to deliberately tenders on writing more than he considers a fair rent under the auction system, the probability is that in the excitement of the competition at the sale he may be induced to go a good deal further than he would otherwise go. Therefore I should give tender notice a fair trial. I wish to say a few words with regard to the forfeited country outside the schedule. It comprises an area of some 80,000 square miles and produces no revenue, which is a very serious matter. I notice in a supplement to the Government Gazette dated the 18th instant it is intended to sell by auction, at the impossible to deal with tenders from the Queen street, Brisbane, on Tuesday, the 28th of this month, a number of leases comprised within that area of forfeited country. The Secretary for Public Lands: Only the unexpired terms of the leases.

Mr. CURTIS: In some cases the leases are for nine and ten years. If these blocks, as is not unlikely, are the eyes of the country containing all the available water, it would be a mistake to sell the lease of them for ten years.

The Speaker: Order! The hon. member is now dealing with a matter which has no connection with the principles of this Bill.

Mr. CURTIS: I shall only say, again, that I protest against the sale of land in this way by tender, which has not been the practice in the hands of a few persons, often absentee, as has been the case in Southern Queensland. We do not want to have a repetition of what has taken place on the Darling Downs, and I contend that people who live in the country, and whose future
welfare is bound up in the country, have a per-
fekt right to protest against the continuance of this policy. If this land was sold to bond fide selectors, it would not be an objection, but it is a vicious principle for the sale of large areas for revenue purposes, and the sooner it is discontinued the better. It would be better to devise some plan of raising revenue. I hope the Bill will pass its second reading, so that it may become law before the end of this session.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS, in reply: I think it is only courteous that I should reply to some of the remarks that have been made in reference to the Bill, although I must thank hon. members generally for the kind reception they have given it. In introducing the Bill I urged upon hon. members that they should refrain so far as possible from making charges against officers of the department, as it seemed unfair, and to some extent unnecessary, to attack what had not the appearance of defending themselves. If much attack was made upon the officers they should be made in committee on the Estimates when the officers were present, and all information is available. I am satisfied that in every case they have acted conscientiously in the discharge of their duties, and that they are anxious to do all they can to please the public, and to enable the land agent, as efficiently as possible, to sell it. The hon. member, Mr. Kidston, referred to a small matter that I may have passed over. He said that a land agent informed a gentleman, for whose credit he vouches, that instructions had been given him that no information should be given regarding land which was open or might be open. I am satisfied that the gentleman referred to is under a misconception. The land agent is there for the purpose of giving that information, and it seems incredible that he should be put in that position.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I think the hon. member rather overstated the area, but he was not very far wrong. He spoke of the country outside the schedule as if the whole of it were forfeited, but that is not so. Only that coloured pink on the map is forfeited, and a great deal of the large open country has no hesitation in saying that it is forfeited because there is no information as to the quality of the land, and on the strength of those presentations, and without going on to it himself he says it was part of his instructions that he should not give information. If the officer made such a statement he would deserve to be dismissed at once as being unfit for his position, but I am satisfied that he did not. I think the explanation is this: That the gentlemen in question went to the office and asked for information concerning leases which were open or might be open. I am satisfied that the gentleman referred to is under a misconception. The land agent is there for the purpose of giving that information, and it seems incredible that he should be put in that position.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I have said before that I consider it does require special legislation. I do not think we shall ever do very much with the piece of country which is now throwing open to occupation license the area that was forfeited has had the effect of inducing people occupying frontages, whose back blocks might be threatened, to obtain occupation licenses—possibly for the purpose of blackmailing—it had the effect of inducing them to come forward and say that the unoccupied balance of the lease shall be put up to auction. A large proportion, however, will continue to be unoccupied, because it would not pay a man to take it up even if he got it for nothing. We hope that the extension of our trunk lines of railways and of a line from the Gulf towards Cloncurry will open up a large portion of country in that direction. I shall not deal at any great length with the speeches delivered by hon. members; but I wish to refer to the statement that the Government have refrained from exercising many of the great suggestions made by the Lands Commission. On the contrary, I think I can show that we have adopted a good many. There are at least four very important reforms which have been embodied in the Bill itself, and there are a number of matters in connection with the administration of the department which do not find a place in legislation but which I have adopted nevertheless. I may say that the inquiries of the Lands Commission led them to the same conclusion as I have arrived at, that the department acquired since I took office; and in many respects I am proposing to carry out suggestions of the commission. In some respects I had actually anticipated their recommenda-
tions. For instance, they recommend uniform survey fees. I laid on the table the formulated regulations for the adoption of uniform survey fees throughout the colony, so that every selector knows exactly what he will have to pay.

Mr. Murray: They are not done at a uniform cost.

The Secretary for Public Lands: No, but the amount charged is the average. It has taken many months going through a long series of items showing the cost of surveys in various parts of the colony to formulate that scale, and I believe it will work admirably.

Mr. Leary: They are nearly always refused, I know.

The Secretary for Public Lands: Yes, and I certainly think they should be refused, unless the board itself, as has happened on one or two occasions, expressly desires to review the decision.

Mr. Dawson: How would that work in the District Court?

The Secretary for Public Lands: The District Court has power to grant a new trial, and the grounds on which a rehearing is granted before the board are the same as those on which a court of law would grant an application for a new trial. That is one of the principles under which the immediate predecessor in office, if not other Ministers. The question of appeals is one upon which there has been a good deal of heartburning. I have said before—and I cannot say too often—that there is an appeal in the present law not really in the nature of an appeal. When a matter goes from the Land Board to a Superior Court judge and assessors it is a new trial, but it is not an appeal in the strict sense of the term. The question of appeals is one upon which there has been a good deal of heartburning. I have said before—and I cannot say too often—that there is an appeal in the present law not really in the nature of an appeal. When a matter goes from the Land Board to a Superior Court judge and assessors it is a new trial, but it is not an appeal in the strict sense of the term.

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Mr. Leahey: Not if the parties consent.

Mr. LEAHY: The Speaker is not putting it fairly.

Mr. Leahey: That is not putting it fairly.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I think so.

Mr. Leahey: All right, we will fix that up in committee.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I am simply dealing now with the argument that there was no such repudiation, and the deprivation was caused by the action of the court. This argument is not put forward by every member of the public.

Mr. Leahey: Of course, you are giving a summary. What do you mean by the public?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I mean those who are interested in the proposal, and who have heard the argument. I am not allowing the honor member to speak to the argument. I contend—and I believe my arguments are supported by eminent jurists—that an alteration of a tribunal, or the substitution of one tribunal for another, must be subjected to such an inquiry, and no such act can be regarded as an act of repudiation; notwithstanding, if it is a part of the community—honestly think that the rights are being repudiated by any such act, that it savours of repudiation, unless Parliament is thoroughly satisfied that these complaints will be silenced by its action, it is not desirable that it should go forth to the world that a large section of the community think they are laboring under disabilities which have been imposed upon them. Seeing that there is such a strong exception taken to the proposal in the Bill, it may be desirable to concede something to those lessees who are in occupation of the land under the Act of 1884 and the amending Acts. I shall therefore propose in committee that the Bill shall stand as it is so far as the tribunal is concerned—that up to a certain point the procedure in every case shall be exactly similar. There will be first of all the hearing before a single member of the Land Court, then there will be the rehearing before the Land Appeal Court, consisting of two members of the court and a District Court judge. So far as regards tenures created under the Land Act of 1884, I agree that it is desirable to concede something to those lessees who are in occupation of the land under the Act of 1884 and the amending Acts, if any person thinks himself aggrieved at the decision of the Land Appeal Court, he shall have the right to go to the present Appeal Court, and apply for a rehearing before a judge of the Supreme Court sitting with assessors. I do not like that. I like best what is now in the Bill, but, in view of the strong opposition to the proposals of the Bill, not only in the Press of Queensland, but throughout Australasia, where this matter has been considered as affecting the rights of property, I think the suggestion I have made is a fair way out of the difficulty. It will enable this Parliament to do justice to the lessees without incurring the reproach of having done something savouring of repudiation.

Mr. Dawson: You mean it is a fair compromise.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I hold that it is not repudiation, but other people hold it is. The only ground on which it can be argued that it is repudiation is that it is a part of a contract which has been made with the Crown tenants, and that is the only reason why it should be retained. It is absolutely necessary to reconstitute the Land Board, and if it comes to that, technically, that it is just as much repudiation as the proposal which is in the Bill at the present time. Technically, any interference with that tribunal is repudiation according to the arguments used.

Mr. Leahey: Not if the parties consent.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: But who is going to consent for all the pastoral lessees? Does the honor member assume to speak for all of them?

Mr. Leahey: I speak for the greater part of them.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I hold that what Bulloos and those other persons have said is not the argument. The honorable member can speak for Bulloos, but he cannot say a word for anyone else in this matter. He has no right to speak for my constituents or those of any other honor member. He is quite capable of representing Bulloos in this matter, and ably he does it, but he has no mandate from the pastoral tenants generally to vary the contracts which they have made with the Crown. I do not recognize the honor member as the business agent of his constituents.

Mr. McDonald: I had a mighty big brief a little while ago.
The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: That is not the capacity in which he appears here. He is a parliamentary representative in this House, and has no authority to vary contracts between the State and its tenants unless he comes to my office and produces an authority to represent particular persons. Under a re-hearing by the board might not affect the interests of tenants to the same extent, but as a matter of principle, I think it as much repudiated as the other. I have prepared an amendment embodying the proposal I intend to make, and I now ask outside the schedule of the Act of 1884, to make rabbits, the board shall issue to him a certificate of satisfaction, the part that shall not be overlaid with a vast sheet of amendments, and, members, will thus have less to distract their minds from the subject under consideration. It is not intended to say, in some cases the extraordinary delays—some cases, it was provided in the rabbit boards in the various districts—to what extent it was desirable the rabbit boards should be first distributed. We had only a limited quantity when the inquiry was made, and owing to the delays—in some cases the extraordinary delays—that occurred on the part of persons sending in those recommendations the time slipped by. One board only meets every three months, and their district is a very large one. At last we have received several recommendations and the netting is now being supplied. Then came the question of the charges—an entirely new thing—preparing them and sending them out to the various lessees throughout the country, which was a formidable departmental labour. They came back in many instances filled up wrong, signed wrong, and so on. However, I think the thing is in a fair way now, and we shall be able to supply the netting, though certainly not in time to enable the lessees to obtain the benefit of the Act passed for that purpose unless this amendment of the law takes place and the period is extended for another twelve months. I have before me the cases of two runs, the owners of which did not come to their board for their netting, or for a very small portion in one case. They elected to find their own netting owing to the delay they saw would take place before they could get it from the Crown. They, in their desire to run no possible risk of going past the date allowed by the present law, in one case they have actually spent a large amount of money. They finished erecting forty or fifty miles of netting about six months ago; they have 100 miles more of netting on the ground, and they have spent between March, 1890, and March, 1897, £6,000 on the erection of the netting. The whole of the contractors threw up their contracts six months ago, and are unable to proceed with the work owing to the drought. The southern and western boundaries are not completed. There are still fifteen or sixteen miles more to be done, and they cannot possibly complete even that part before the 31st December, 1897. In the other case forty miles of netting have been erected on the eastern boundary, and sixteen miles on the southern boundary. The owners have fifty-five miles of netting on the run and thirty-five more at the nearest railway station which they cannot move until they get their net, and of course the contractors have given up the work and cleared out, and it was impossible for them to complete even the southern and western boundaries.

PASTORAL LEASES EXTENSION BILL.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Question put and passed; and the committal of the Bill made an Order of the Day for Tuesday next.
Mr. Kerr: Are those cases in the Central district?  

Mr. Fitzgerald: What sort of a boundary would that be?  

Mr. Murra: I am very pleased to find that the Secretary for Lands has introduced this Bill, because it is absolutely necessary, as I know many cases in which leases have been taken, through drought and other causes, to comply with the conditions of the Fencing Act. This extension of time will overcome the difficulty,
and will be a great boon to those now engaged in extending rabbit-proof fences. I also agree with the provision that a lessee should not be compelled to put up a rabbit-proof fence upon the exact boundary of his holding, because in many instances the boundary runs along a watercourse, and the fence would be always liable to be swept away. I know also that there is a general consent amongst farmers that they are compelled by law to erect rabbit-proof fences, which they cannot afford in many cases, and it is not necessary really. At one time it was greatly to the interest of making rabbit-proof fencing compulsory, but having seen the hardship that such a provision inflicts upon many settlers, I have come to the conclusion that it is better to make it optional. This is a concession that will be very much approved of; but I think it would have been better to have given the rabbit board a say as to where fences shall be erected. They are supposed to supervise the erection of these fences, and they would be the best judges as to the necessity of erecting them. In places where different selectors are separated by blocks of inferior country which no one would think worth enclosing, the board should step in and erect the necessary fences, so that there should be no breaks in the line. I shall support the second reading.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I did not expect this Bill would have been brought forward so soon, but I should have prepared with a few facts that have come under my notice. I cannot look upon this Bill without some suspicion, and I shall not as a private member to support me. The only clause with which I agree is clause 4, which gives the Minister power, with the approval of the board, to exempt selectors from erecting rabbit-proof fences. I may mention that a lot of country west of Longreach only came under the Pastoral Leases Extension Act after the passing of the Act of 1895, but a lot of selections were thrown open on Wellshot and other runs before then, and the selectors are not compelled to fence with rabbit-proof netting. One of the selections in the middle of this group was forfeited, and was taken up again after the Act of 1895 came into force, and the selector was compelled to put up a rabbit-proof fence, whereas the other selectors were not under that Act he cannot even claim half the cost of the fence. All those selections are in a part of the country where rabbits are not to be feared, and this fencing means a tremendous expense. Many of the selectors have written to me saying that if the thought the department would have insisted upon this fencing they would not have taken up the selections, so if this clause is passed it will be great relief to them. With reference to section 6, which is really the point in dispute, I think that those runholders, especially round my district, have a very good bargain as it is—too good, in fact; and this is going to extend the time. I think the Minister should have told us whose fault it was that the delay took place.

The Secretary for Public Lands: It was not the fault of the lessees.

Mr. FITZGERALD: I understand that the hon. gentleman sent to them for information, and they objected to the prices. Some hon. members.interpreted that was with reference to the securities, but I do not know what that means. Does it mean that the mortgagees would lose land on the leases and deposit them with the Minister? Where is the difficulty about the security?

Mr. LEAHY: Certain schedule forms had to be signed.

Mr. FITZGERALD: If they kept the department waiting from December, 1895, until now for schedule forms to be signed there was gross negligence somewhere, and they do not deserve any assistance. I also agree with the provision that the scale is to be extended for a period of two years. When the extension it was understood that they were to fence the whole of their country; now it is proposed that where the natural features of the country are such that a watercourse of rabbits they are to get the benefit of that by not being obliged to fence, but the Government are not to get anything in return. We have statements made re proof something; but here it is proposed to make people a present of more than they bargained for. It has not been explained to me by way of making rabbit-proof fence how the delay has occurred, and I do not see why they should get more time than is allowed under the present Act, which provides that they can get permission up to the 31st December, 1898. Surely between now and then they will have had time to have this rabbit-proof fencing finished.

Mr. GROOM: I think that if the Bill is passed only for the sake of putting the 4th clause into operation it will accomplish a great deal of good. The evidence given by a number of persons pointed out that the fencing with wire was a very serious grievance, and was positively causing the destruction of rabbits. They all complain about rabbit fencing. A hard-working man would have insisted upon this fencing they would have been put up with wire. The selector took up land like that, and the adjoining lessee had the fence. The selector would have insisted upon the fence, and it is only fair to extend the Act to select, so that I can find any kind of a member to support me. The only clause with which I agree is clause 4, which gives the Minister power, with the approval of the board, to exempt selectors from erecting rabbit-proof fences. I may mention that a lot of country west of Longreach only came under the Pastoral Leases Extension Act after the passing of the Act of 1895, but a lot of selections were thrown open on Wellshot and other runs before then, and the selectors are not compelled to fence with rabbit-proof netting. One of the selections in the middle of this group was forfeited, and was taken up again after the Act of 1895 came into force, and the selector was compelled to put up a rabbit-proof fence, whereas the other selectors were not under that Act he cannot even claim half the cost of the fence. All those selections are in a part of the country where rabbits are not to be feared, and this fencing means a tremendous expense. Many of the selectors have written to me saying that if they thought the department would have insisted upon this fencing they would not have taken up the selections, so if this clause is passed it will be great relief to them. With reference to section 6, which is really the point in dispute, I think that those runholders, especially round my district, have a very good bargain as it is—too good, in fact; and this is going to extend the time. I think the Minister should have told us whose fault it was that the delay took place.

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Pastoral Leases [23 September.] Extension Bill. 335

...tank-sinking, but are not good at financial calculations, have fenced in with a six-wire fence. They are unable to find the money to put up a rabbit-proof fence, so that if it still remains compulsory it means ruin to good citizens. They have not the means, and the capital they have invested will be forfeited.

Another witness gave corroborative evidence, and said—

Without exception I really believe everyone who has taken up a farm lately under the compulsory netting clauses has taken it up in the hope that the Act would be repealed, and he replied, "Yes," That is the evidence given in one district, but in all the rabbit districts we visited similar testimony was given by selectors—that compulsory fencing by them at the present time would be minuscule in many instances; and, as the Minister pointed out, without any practical effect, because very often one selection is enclosed with wire-netting; an intervening space of fifty or sixty miles is without any fence whatever, and the rabbits have full play to come as they please, so that as a preventative of the incursion compulsory netting is a failure. Moreover, to impose on selectors a condition which involves the expenditure of from £1,500 to £2,000, in addition to their other expenses, is imposing upon them an unnecessary burden, and I am therefore very glad that the Minister has brought forward this amending Bill. I suggested incidentally just now that land commissioners should be empowered to grant permission to dispense with the erection of fences in cases of extreme necessity. I am aware that in many districts the persons holding the office of land commissioner or land agent have multifarious duties to perform, but I hope that in future each gentleman will probably be called upon to report on the office, and that he discharged his duties and appointed his own officers. I could mention one district where I am perfectly satisfied that the gentleman who acts as land agent should not be in charge of the office. A more unsatisfactory witness, or one who was able to give less information in regard to the details of his office, I do not think the commission could possibly have examined. In fact, he proved that the sooner he is relieved of his duties in connection with the Lands Department the better it would be for the department and for selectors. But in other districts there are thoroughly competent officers. As I said on the second reading of the Land Bill, it is asking the Land Board to deal with details that could very well be attended to by efficient commissioners. Mr. Francis, the commissioner for Crown lands at Cunnamulla, is an exceedingly competent officer, and the evidence he gave before the commission was of a highly satisfactory character. He proved by his evidence that he was thoroughly acquainted with the work of his office, and that he discharged his duties to the satisfaction of the department and the country. Why, then, should you call upon selectors in a district like Cloncurry to go through the formality of sending in an application to the Land Board?

The Secretary for Public Lands: They have simply to write a letter, and the commissioner will probably be called upon to report on each case.

Mr. GROOM: After you pass Thargomindah and gradually come in towards the settled districts, the less apprehension there appears to be of an incursion of rabbits. The Rabbit Boards have not been two boundaries drawn between New South Wales and Queensland—one along the border, and the other about fifty or sixty miles inside that these fences largely prevented the rabbits from coming into the colony. The Rabbit Boards in the Thargomindah district have expended about £54,000 in the erection of rabbit-proof fences, and in doing so they have done great service to the colony. But when you come into the settled districts it does appear an injustice to call upon selectors, whose capital is very limited, to erect rabbit-proof fences that are unnecessary. While I agree that every facility should be given to pastoral tenants to erect these fences, I am one of those who think that a very grievous mistake was made when we agreed to an extension of their leases for seven years, and I hope that mistake will not be repeated.

An Honourable Member: Many of them have not taken advantage of it.

Mr. GROOM: All the stations held by financial institutions have done so, and it was an injustice to the colony to give them a long extension of their leases at the rental they now enjoy.

The Secretary for Public Lands: It was done under a scare.

Mr. GROOM: I believe it was done under a scare. We do not now see what we saw just at the time the hon. gentlemen refer to, when you could scarcely take up an issue of one of the daily papers in the city which did not contain sensational telegrams stating that rabbits had been discovered by the millions in such-and-such a place. A special commissioner was employed for no other purpose than to go into New South Wales and write about the effects of the rabbit incursion there, and tell us what was likely to be the effect here supposing the rabbits got into this colony. A scare was created by these sensational stories and telegrams, and we committed the grievous mistake of extending the pastoral leases for another seven years. Of course the error has been committed, and those who have obtained the extension are reaping the advantage of it, but it should not be repeated. I shall vote for the second reading of the Bill.

Mr. KERR: Like the hon. member for Mitchell, I do not believe that this is such an innocent little Bill as it looks. The Secretary for Lands gave several reasons why this extension should be given. One reason was that the schedules which had been sent out to pastoralists had not been filled in in a proper manner and were returned to the Lands Department. There are other reasons why the delay has taken place, and it is just as well that the public should be given both sides of the question, because the taxpayers are finding the money for the wire-netting, and it is the pastoralists who are receiving the benefit.

Mr. LEAHY: They are paying 5 per cent. for the money.

Mr. KERR: The hon. member knows that it is much easier to pay 5 per cent. on the cost of an article than to pay for the article straight out.

Mr. LEAHY: Yes, but the Government make a profit of 2 per cent. on the transaction.

Mr. KERR: One reason why the squatters are asking for a further extension is because they have been unable to get the fences erected in time. Contracts have been let to men from New South Wales, who have sublet to others. After these sub-contractors have been at work for some time they have found that they will be unable to even make wages, and they have thrown up their contracts. Such facts have come under my notice in connection with Lansdowne, Bundaberg, and other stations. A contractor from New South Wales sublet to others, who found that they could not make a living out of their contracts, and threw up the work, and then could not get payment for the portion of the fence that they had erected.

The Secretary for Public Lands: Would you penalise everyone because a thing of the kind had occurred?
Mr. KERR: Then I have been informed that a number of hotelkeepers took contracts and sublet them, and that working men in the district I represent have been unable to get employment because the contracts have been taken so cheap. That is one cause of delay. The Secretary for Lands told us that there has been a delay in supplying the pastoral leases with netting. Several hon. members know that nothing has been done at the railway stations, whereas by the assurance of the Minister that it was nothing of the kind. It is wire-netting, the proceeds of money voted yearly on the Estimates for erecting barrier fences across country that has not taken advantage of the Act.

Mr. LEAHY: The hon. member who has just sat down rather confused things. He made statements that he certainly did not prove. He based all his argument on the assumption that certain wire-netting stacked at the railway stations was for the use of persons who have taken advantage of the Act, whereas he has no assurance of the Minister that it was nothing of the kind. It is wire-netting, the proceeds of money voted yearly on the Estimates for erecting barrier fences across country that has not taken advantage of the Act.

Mr. KERR: The wire-netting that I know of is at Alpha Station.

Mr. LEAHY: There is a great deal of rabbit-infested country to which Alpha is the nearest station. When the Secretary for Lands, by interjection, explained to the hon. member that he was wrong he should have accepted that explanation, unless he is in a position to prove the contrary. I regret to see so much partisan feeling being displayed in this House.

Assuming that the pastoralist does get twelve months' extension to enable him to put up the netting, does it harm anyone? There is no subsequent time to enable the pastoralist to stack it at the railway stations and come under the Act if it is done at extraordinary expense, and the contention of some hon. members seems to be that he should be compelled to do it. It seems to be a sufficient satisfaction to them to know that the pastoralist would have to pay a great deal more for it than it is owned under reasonable circumstances.

That is an extraordinary spirit to be exhibited by men who pretend to legislate in the interests of all classes of the community, and I wish to explain my great regret at hearing such sentiments coming from any member of the House. As far as I am concerned, this Bill does not affect my electorate at all. I believe there is one station in the electorate which has taken advantage of the Act, and that is in the north-east, near Charleville. The owners of country most affected by rabbits have not taken advantage of the Act, and yet a great many of the stations are owned by large financial institutions. Let me tell the hon. member for Yowalla that he is entirely mistaken when he says that all the stations owned by financial institutions had done so. I tell him he is entirely wrong. The hon. member has told us on several occasions that he is not able to vote under the belief that the Act would be put in force—that the men who got the extension would have to pay for it in the contract.

Mr. LEAHY: That netting is not found under this Act at all.

Mr. KERR: Allowing that, the pastoral leases have failed to complete the work in the time specified, and they now ask for another extension. The Land Board has the power, as the hon. member for Mitchell pointed out, to grant an extension when delay arises from some unavoidable cause, such as a drought or a want of labour, until the end of 1898. If this Bill is passed, the pastoral leases will apply for the extension to be given by the Bill, and then when the time has expired they will apply to the Land Board for a further extension on the ground that they have been unable to obtain labour, or that the carriers will not carry their material out to the runs, and so they will be given until the end of 1899. That is too much time. The people who are living in those districts have come to the conclusion that the squatters have had a very fair extension of time already. If they had not had the contract they would not have been able to stack the wire-netting as they have done, and they would not have been able to take the bread out of the mouths of carriers and other workers in the colony.

Mr. LEAHY: The hon. member who has just sat down rather confused things. He made statements that he certainly did not prove. He based all his argument on the assumption that certain wire-netting stacked at the railway stations was for the use of persons who have taken advantage of the Act, whereas he has no assurance of the Minister that it was nothing of the kind. It is wire-netting, the proceeds of money voted yearly on the Estimates for erecting barrier fences across country that has not taken advantage of the Act.
There are a great many cases in which much employment could be afforded in the West by the erection of these fences, and I can assure hon. members opposite that by taking the steps that are being taken, and are they doing a very serious injury to a class of men whom they profess to be animated with a desire to serve. I venture to say that no class of men, not even rabbit fencers, earn better wages than rabbit fencers. In many cases they make £4, £5, and £6 a week, but of course that is when they are working eight hours a day. They are on piece-work, and put in as much as twelve and fourteen hours a day.

Mr. MCDONALD: One man does two weeks work in a week and deprives another of work.

Mr. LEAHY: The hon. member gets two men's wages but he does not share it with anyone.

Mr. MCDONALD: You get a thousand a year and do not share it with anyone.

Mr. LEAHY: If I do not share what I have, I do not advocate that others should share what they have. If I laid down that doctrine as the hon. member does, I should endeavour to give effect to it in practice. There are some things in this Bill which are of great interest to the class of settlers which hon. members take a great interest in. I may not be given credit for it, but I am strongly in favour of close settlement of the land, and the Bill provides in this Bill various provisions which will enable the Minister to assist close settlement. The time is fast approaching when close settlement will be the ruling power in the land, and it will be a very good thing that every man should have an opportunity of making a home for himself and his family. There is a provision in the Bill enabling land to be erected on the outside boundaries, and it is a most reasonable thing. It is a matter of very great relief that that provision should be carried out, and it will be extremely beneficial for the small settler. I will repeat that I have not risen on behalf of any special interest. I have risen because I think that, having entered into this contract, and the opportunities for carrying it out being beyond the control of one party or the other—if it can be shown that no injury is done to the SLANDLES association individual, but on the contrary that it will give a great measure of relief, we should accept the measure. A good deal has been said about the boundaries of the Pastoral Leases, and it is said that the matter is one that should be settled by the individual, but it is too late to go into that matter now. I have never supported those boundaries, and I think that they are a great deal of country that will be required for close settlement. One effect of this Bill will be the erection of a barrier of fences across south-western Queensland, and if by its means we can prevent the incursion of rabbits into the fairest land in Queensland we shall be doing a very good action indeed; and any man who stands up here to oppose it—if that invaluable benefit can be brought about by its means—will be doing an injury to the colony; and only those should do so who are acting on the strictest personal knowledge of the facts.

Mr. BATTERSBY: It is amusing to hear the hon. member for Bulloo tell us that this Bill will only affect one of our pasturage districts. I am going to tell him that there are 175,000 acres in that one station. At an earlier stage to-night we passed the second reading of a Bill to consolidate our 19nd laws, and now, five minutes afterwards, we are asked to amend the Pastoral Leases Extension Acts, 1892 to 1895. The Minister has given us no idea what it is all about. The 1st clause is all right. The 2nd is to amend sections 4 and 5 of the Act of 1892. If the hon. gentleman had told us what those sections were we should have been able to compare them with the proposed amendment.

Clause 3 is to amend the 6th section of the Act of 1892; he might have told us what that section was. Clause 4 is to amend section 4 of the Act of 1892, why don't they explain that? Clause 5 is to further amend section 4 of the Act of 1894—it appears they could not put it all in—and to repeal section 5 of the Act of 1895. I do not say that the Bill is not a good one; I say that the Minister can do is to put this Bill in the fire, and embody its provisions in the Land Bill and have done with it. That is my opinion, and I give it for what it is worth. I say that our land laws from 1884 to the present have been a disgrace to those who made them at first and who have been trying to amend them afterwards. Burn them all and give us the land laws we had from 1898 to 1984, with perhaps a few amendments added. It will be better for the settled districts at any rate. If this Bill goes to a division I shall vote against it.

Mr. HARDACRE: This Bill has some very good things, and also some very objectionable things. The provision in the Bill for the Minister to exempt grazing farms from the necessity of constructing rabbit-proof fences deserves the thanks of grazing farmers generally in those areas. I have had many occasions quite recently, seeking the particular when the matter came up in the House to try and get something of the kind in the Land Bill. The possibility of having to go to an enormous expense to construct rabbit-proof fences has proved to be an obstruction to settlement, especially in cattle country. Without referring to the second clause of the Bill, providing that it shall not be necessary to erect a fence on any boundary whose natural features are of such a character as to be sufficient for the purpose of excluding the passage of rabbits. I suppose this is a corollary to the Fencing Bill we passed the other day dealing with trespass by cattle.

The Secretary for Public Lands: It is not intended to have any reference to that. What clause are you speaking of?

Mr. HARDACRE: Clause 2. It seems rather a strange thing that although we are going to give this concession, the lease is to be enabled to get the same term of lease as if he was compelled to find the full cost of fencing the whole of his holding. If the concession is permitted it is only fair that there should be a reduction in the extended lease in proportion to the reduced cost to the lessee on account of the concession. The principal clause in the Bill, extending the time within which leases can take advantage of the extended lease, will receive opposition from me. It is perhaps the only objectionable thing in the Bill. I cannot quite understand the attitude of the Minister to-night. On the one hand, he pictures the terrible evil of the spread of the pest, and on the other, he admits that the Act of 1895 was passed in a panic, under a fear for which there was no real foundation. I strongly opposed against the passing of that Act, and was almost insulted for the attitude I took up at the time in station in his electorate. I never spoke at all on it.

Mr. LEAHY: I can tell you there is a very big danger yet.

Mr. HARDACRE: If the Minister's attitude surprises me, the attitude of the hon. member for Bulloo surprises me more, because no one fought more strongly against the Act of 1895 than that hon. member.

Mr. LEAHY: I never spoke at all on it.

Mr. HARDACRE: I do not know whether he made a speech, but he spoke a good deal by interjections. He told us that only eight grazing farmers in his district have taken advantage of
the Act. He said at that time that the Bill was perfectly useless, and he comes down to-night and supports this Bill. I interjected that the Minister had forgotten his own report, and I think so more strongly than ever now after his explanation. There are some very pertinent and strong remarks on the subject in the report of the department. Speaking of the increase of rabbits the Under Secretary says—

Undoubtedly the worst portion of the colony, and one by reason of its anomalous characteristics calculated to act as a breeding-ground, is the area at its south-west corner, as shown hatched red on the lithograph accompanying this report. To the northward and outward the pest gradually decreases.

Mr. Inspector Avery observes, in his report of the 8th December last—

On the whole the pest has not increased or advanced in the three districts—Leichhardt, Mitchell, and Gregory North—as much or as rapidly as during the previous year, and this is purely owing to the extremely dry state of the country.

Mr. LEAHY: Is Avery down on Bulloo Downs?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: No; he does not go down there at all.

Mr. HARDACRE: I am quoting from the last report laid on the table as I find it. Mr. Avery's report goes on to say—

And I am of opinion that, provided the lines of fencing are kept in check by poling, etc., and taking into consideration the many dry seasons which occur in the far West, there is no very great danger of the country and North part of the colony being over-run.

Mr. LEAHY: So long as you do certain things.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: In consequence of the fencing.

Mr. HARDACRE: Why are you going to give an extension of lease to the pastoral lessees for fencing in their holdings if it is the border fence that is the real protection? The report further says—

Mr. Dividing Commissioner Gibson, whose experience in the north-west portion of the colony is second to none, states in his report of 12th December—:

Referring to your request that I should give you the result of my own observations in the north-west portion of the colony that I have lately been inspecting as to the increasing number of rabbits during the last twelve months, I beg to state that, in my opinion, formed on very careful observation, I have reason to think that no headway whatever has been made by the pest.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Again in consequence of the fencing.

Mr. HARDACRE: It is in consequence of the border fencing, why should we give an extension of lease for fencing that is no protection at all?

The SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member seems to me to be arguing against an extension of lease, which is not dealt with in the Bill.

Mr. HARDACRE: I think so. The clause is now dealing with provisions for an extension of the time within which the provision for an extension of lease may be taken advantage of.

Mr. HARDACRE: If it is in consequence of the border fencing, why should we give an extension of lease for fencing that is no protection at all?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: There is great fear.

Mr. HARDACRE: It is well to get at the facts. Commissioner Gibson also says that on no station had he seen or heard of any systematic efforts in the direction of exterminating rabbits, and he did not think there was a single man employed in rabbiting on the Bulloo, who did not lead him to the conclusion that the lessees did not consider the condition of things as very serious, He did not think that the carrying capabilities of the land had been depreciated by the rabbits, and what forfeitures there had been had no connection with the rabbit pest. On points to the fact that the object in passing the principal Act was not to protect the pastoral lessees, but to encourage the pastoral lessees to fence in the pick of their holdings. A delegation waited upon the Secretary for Lands, consisting of lessees from the central district, who had been miles from any rabbits in their fields, and had never fences in their holdings, and any rabbits had been seen, but those are the stations which had been fenced in, while the country in the south-west corner where injury is being done have not been fenced. At the time that Act was introduced there were telegrams in the papers stating that rabbits had been seen near Barcaldine, but there are always alarms when fresh concessions are required. The Minister is very inconsistent, because on the one hand he says that it is desirable to encourage this kind of improvement, while on the other he admits that the Act was passed in a state of panic.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I did not say that.

Mr. HARDACRE: The hon. member said it was passed in the midst of a panic, upon false assumptions, or at least that is a fair inference to draw from his statement. The only reason I can see for the extension of time now asked is that a delay has taken place for which the lessee cannot be blamed. The delay was altogether on the part of the Government, and that being the case I have no hesitation in supporting this clause as long as it does not apply to any new leases. Whether the information of the hon. member for Barcoo is correct or not I do not know, but I do know that Alphna is not the nearest station to any place where there is a board wire-netting fence.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Is it Government wire-netting?

Mr. HARDACRE: It cannot possibly be, and there was a statement in a Rockhampton paper that it was for a station near there, Greenalde, I think. The Minister admitted that one of the reasons for the delay was that they could not give security, but was that the fault of the Government, or that the lessees could not find security and wanted a longer time?

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: Neither one nor the other. It was inevitable.

Mr. HARDACRE: If it was solely the fault of the Government, then it is a fair thing to give the lessee an extension of time, but I would suggest that the date should be altered in the second paragraph of clause 4 of the principal Act instead of the first paragraph. However, that is a matter we can discuss in committee. The Bill has some good points, and for the sake of the good things in it I shall vote for the second reading, and reserve the right to oppose the objectionable clauses in committee.

Mr. STORY: I thought when this Bill was introduced there would have been only one or two speeches, and they would have contained a hearty welcome to such a Bill. If we had more legislation of this type it would be better for the country. It is a short measure; it is eminently useful, and people have been looking out for it for a considerable time. I think that in a certain way it will do as much actual good as the Land Bill itself. The fact of not confusing the erection of fences to the exact boundaries is in our district a wise and economical effort, and the compensation netting clause has been considered so unjust and unnecessary as applied to certain lands that people have imposed on the Bulloo, while at the same time improvements in the hope and faith that they would not be forced to wire-net their
holdings, because it is of no advantage either
to themselves or to the district. The Rabbit
Board has power to order the erection of
rabbit-proof fences wherever they are necessary,
so that there is no danger to be feared from the
exemption. The last clause in the Bill giving
an extension of time for lessees to put up
wire-netting is necessary almost entirely on ac-
count of circumstances. The drought has been
bad in some places, and when the whole of
the cattle and sheep have to be taken away
because there is no water, and there is not a
single riding horse left on the station, it is
not possible for a man to get contractors
to put up a fence miles away from water.
If a man has given notice that he intends to
fence, and cannot do so or does not want to fence,
he will not do so any the more by getting a year’s
extension of time; but if he is anxious to fence
and circumstances have been against him, it is
only fair that he should have a chance. It
would be hard to say to a man, “You are
not in fault, nevertheless you must suffer the
penalty.” I look upon this Bill as one of the
best measures introduced since I have been
in the House, and I shall give it my hearty
support.

Question put and passed; and committal of the
Bill made an order for Tuesday next.
The House adjourned at seventeen minutes
past 10 o’clock.