

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

THURSDAY, 25th OCTOBER, 1917.

Vol. 98.—No. 129.

OFFICIAL REPORT.



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HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Thursday, 25th October, 1917.

[OFFICIAL REPORT.]

The House met at a Quarter before Three of the clock, Mr. **SPEAKER** in the Chair.

NEW WRIT.

For the Borough of Salford (North Division), in the room of Sir William Pollard Byles, Knight, deceased.—[*Mr. Gulland.*]

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL.

Mr. **CHANCELLOR**: I beg to present a Petition from the borough council of Shoreditch, praying this House, on the ground of justice and policy, not to deprive the borough of the services of one of its Members of Parliament and two county councillors, as proposed in the Representation of the People Bill.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS.

WAR.

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

6. Mr. **O'LEARY** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether he can state the grounds on which an old age pension has been refused to Jeremiah Harrington, of Coorycullane, Glengarriffe, county Cork, seeing that his only means are a room in a house and the right to graze a cow, which he is too poor to purchase, on a wretched uneconomic mountain farm the rent of which is under £3 per annum and which, in the ordinary way of family settlement in Ireland, he assigned some time ago to his son?

The **CHIEF SECRETARY** for IRELAND (Mr. Duke): This claim was disallowed on the ground that the claimant's means exceeded the statutory limit. He assigned

his farm to his son, but not "in the ordinary way of family settlement," as the son was not getting married, and it was held that the claimant had deprived himself of means with a view to obtaining a pension.

Mr. **O'LEARY**: May I ask how it is the Local Government Board know that he assigned?

Mr. **DUKE**: If the hon. Gentleman will put a question down I will get an answer to it.

Mr. **O'SHAUGHNESSY**: Is that not always what the Local Government Board say when they refuse pensions?

Mr. **DUKE**: It may be often the fact.

54. Mr. **BYRNE** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will issue instructions that will enable all persons over the age of seventy years to obtain the old age pension regardless of their income or if he will raise the amount which claimants can earn in order to allow deserving cases to receive the pension?

Mr. **BALDWIN** (Joint Financial Secretary to the Treasury): The answer is in the negative. Both of the hon. Member's proposals would require legislation, and the Government are not prepared to go beyond the recent scheme for the grant of additional allowances to old age pensioners as set out in Cd. 8658.

55. Colonel Lord H. **CAVENDISH-BENTINCK** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his attention has been called to a resolution of the Executive Council of the Hearts of Oak Benefit Society, calling upon the Government to grant the extra 2s. 6d. to all old age pensioners, irrespective of new administrative concessions, and to make such concessions apply to applicants for old age pensions; and whether, in view of the fact that many old people are suffering hardship at the present moment, he will without delay grant these demands?

Mr. **BALDWIN**: The answer to the first part of the question is in the affirmative. In reply to the second part, I am not satisfied that it is necessary to go beyond the extended scheme for the grant of additional allowances to old age pensioners which was only brought into operation last August.

Mr. **BUTCHER**: Would my hon. Friend bring in a short Bill for granting these

[Mr. Butcher.]

concessions to new applicants for the old age pensions, as well as to existing old age pensioners?

Lord H. CAVENDISH-BENTINCK: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there is a very strong feeling in the country for this alteration?

Mr. BUTCHER: Will the hon. Gentleman answer my question?

Mr. BALDWIN: I did not hear the question.

Mr. BUTCHER: Will the hon. Gentleman bring in legislation for the purpose of making these concessions applicable to applicants for old age pensions?

Mr. BALDWIN: We have no intention of doing that at present.

FOOD SUPPLIES.

MILK.

7. **Mr. BYRNE** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland what steps, if any, are being taken to safeguard a supply of milk and coal at reasonable prices for the poor and working classes of Ireland during the coming winter months?

Mr. DUKE: As regards milk supply, I have been in communication with the Food Controller. As regards coal, I must refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. BYRNE: In the last few weeks has there not been a considerable increase in the price of coal?

NECESSITOUS SCHOOL CHILDREN (IRELAND).

8. **Mr. BYRNE** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland if it is proposed to make any Grant for the feeding of necessitous school children in Ireland; if he will state the amount to be allowed to England and the amount for Ireland; and if he is aware that this year the sum of £85,000 was allowed to England and nothing to Ireland?

Mr. DUKE: The amount of the Grant provided in the Estimates for the feeding of necessitous school children in England is correctly stated in the question. Generally speaking, the funds available from the rates levied under the Education (Provision of Meals) (Ireland) Act are, I

believe, found sufficient to meet the cost of feeding necessitous school children in Ireland.

Mr. BRADY: If these funds are not sufficient, will the right hon. Gentleman consider the introduction of a Bill as a War measure to enable the local authorities to increase the rate, which is a penny by Statute?

Mr. DUKE: The hon. Member's suggestion will be very carefully considered.

COMPULSORY TILLAGE (IRELAND).

20. **Mr. COOTE** asked the Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture (Ireland) what arrangements are made to supply the necessary manures and fertilisers to Irish farmers for the coming year, in view of the fact that they will be obliged to increase this year's production by 50 per cent.; and if he can explain why the supply of basic slag has been refused to Irish agents and they are informed that they cannot get a supply until spring?

Sir THOMAS RUSSELL (Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture, Ireland): The Department of Agriculture have made arrangements to secure for Ireland its proportion of the available supplies of basic slag, sulphate of ammonia, and superphosphate. Large quantities of slag and sulphate of ammonia have already been imported into Ireland, and supplies are steadily coming in. Raw materials for the manufacture of superphosphate, which is made in Ireland, have been and are being imported in considerable quantities.

Orders have been already placed for all the slag in the United Kingdom which will be available for Ireland until next spring. Those merchants who are only now placing orders will have to secure their supplies from importers in Ireland.

The hon. Member is, I think, under a misapprehension in referring to the obligation upon farmers to increase this year's production by 50 per cent. The increased area under tillage which will be required is an additional 5 per cent.—i.e., a 15 per cent. increase over the amount tilled in the year 1916, subject to the limitation that no farmer will be required to till more than 50 per cent. of his arable land.

21. **Mr. PATRICK WHITE** asked the Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture (Ireland) whether he can state the number of farmers in county

Meath holding over 100 acres in extent who did not comply with the tillage requirements of 10 per cent.; what was the deficiency; and how it is proposed to deal with them?

Sir T. RUSSELL: Inquiries are at present in progress in county Meath, as in other counties, as to cases in which the requirements of the Compulsory Tillage Regulations have not been complied with. Occupiers of arable land who have without reasonable cause failed to cultivate the requisite area have been asked to undertake to have the areas in default ploughed up by a specified date prior to the end of the present year. If an occupier fails to give, or to comply with, such undertaking, the Department will take such action as may be desirable, in exercise of their powers under the Defence of the Realm Regulations, to enforce the requisite cultivation.

Mr. BUTCHER: Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us what was the total amount of land in Meath in default?

Sir T. RUSSELL: I cannot give an answer off-hand, but there were very few defaulters.

Mr. O'SHAUGHNESSY: Ought not these facts be known long ago? What time is this to be seeking information?

Sir T. RUSSELL: I think I can satisfy my hon. Friend. They have up to the 31st December to complete this work, and we could not move before that.

Mr. O'SHAUGHNESSY: I am asking information for last season.

22. **Mr. P. WHITE** asked the Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture (Ireland) whether he will state the number of additional inspectors, clerks, and other hands employed in consequence of the new tillage Regulations, the remunerations and travelling expenses for each grade, and the total amount for which a rate will be asked?

Sir T. RUSSELL: The additional staff employed at present by the Department of Agriculture in connection with the Compulsory Tillage Regulations is as follows:

Temporary Inspectors	...	46
Temporary Clerks	...	102
Temporary Others	...	21
	—	
Total	...	169
	—	

The remuneration of temporary inspectors is £2 2s. per day with second-class rail and 15s. per night subsistence allowance. The pay of the clerks ranges from 19s. per week to £4 per week, according to qualifications. The pay of the miscellaneous staff ranges from 13s. per week to £4 per week. The clerks and miscellaneous staff have no allowances. It is not possible to estimate the amount required for additional staff in 1918-19. This expenditure is defrayed from the Vote of Credit.

Mr. O'LEARY: Will the right hon. Gentleman say how many of those officials are imported from Scotland?

Sir T. RUSSELL: I have not sent to Scotland for any of them.

Mr. O'LEARY: Are they all Irish?

Sir T. RUSSELL: They are, to the best of my knowledge.

APPLES AND POTATOES.

74. **Mr. FELL** asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food if his attention has been called to the prices being charged for articles of food of which there is abundance in the country; why apples, of which there is the heaviest crop on record, are not sold at 2d. a pound instead of from 4d. to 8d., which is the present price, and why potatoes cannot be sold at a halfpenny a pound; and if there is any evidence of a widespread agreement that nothing is to be sold cheaply during the War however abundant it may be?

Mr. PARKER (Lord of the Treasury): Owing to the restriction of imports and the increased cost of labour, transport, packing and other items which make up the cost of production and distribution, it is not to be expected that staple articles of food can be retailed now at anything like normal pre-War prices. There is a good home crop of apples this year, but the excess over normal production is not sufficient to compensate for the loss of imports. With respect to potatoes, I must refer the hon. Member to answers given in this House to questions asked on Thursday and Friday last. The answer to the last part of the question is in the negative.

84. **Major LANE-FOX** asked the President of the Board of Agriculture what is the penalty incurred by any person selling

[Major Lane-Fox.]

potatoes below the guaranteed price of £6 if he finds that he cannot obtain that price for them; and whether he will consider the desirability of modifying any such prohibition of sale, in view of the advantage of bringing into market under present circumstances all available potatoes which are likely to go wrong through further keeping?

Mr. PARKER: I have been asked to reply. The maximum penalties that can be imposed under the Defence of the Realm Regulations for infringements of the Potatoes Order are imprisonment for six months with or without hard labour, and a fine of £100. With reference to the second part of the question, I have nothing to add to the replies given to similar questions on Thursday and Friday of last week.

BISCUITS.

75. **Mr. RENDALL** asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether he is aware that many persons are under the impression that biscuits are not included in the bread and flour ration and may be eaten in addition to such ration; and will he state definitely whether this is so or not?

Mr. PARKER: The intention of the Food Controller was that biscuits should be included in the bread and flour ration, and should not be eaten in addition thereto.

TINNED MILK.

77. **Mr. ARTHUR RICHARDSON** asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Rawmarsh local food control committee, Rotherham, are finding it extremely difficult to get an adequate supply of farmers' milk and of tinned milk; and if he will state what he proposes to do to remedy this?

Mr. PARKER: I have not received any complaint on this subject, but I am causing inquiries to be made.

Mr. RICHARDSON: Is the hon. Member aware that the dealers in the City today are holding stocks in scores of thousands of cases of full cream milk; that they cannot get permits to import them into this country; and the result of that last week was that 17,000 cases of this full cream milk was sold to dealers and sent to France?

Mr. PARKER: I will convey that information to the Food Controller.

CANADIAN LIVE CATTLE (IMPORTATION).

85. **Mr. BOWERMAN** asked the President of the Board of Agriculture (1) whether the Order prohibiting the importation into this country from Canada of live cattle, either for immediate slaughter or stock purposes, was issued in consequence of the alleged prevalence of foot-and-mouth disease; and whether later investigation has proved that at the time the Order in question was issued Canadian cattle were free from such disease; (2) whether it has been decided to remove the embargo upon the importation to this country of live cattle from Canada; if so, whether for immediate slaughter or stock purposes; and when it is contemplated to resume such traffic?

The **PRESIDENT** of the **BOARD of AGRICULTURE** (Mr. Prothero): Canadian cattle born and reared on Canadian soil have been for many years so exceptionally free from infectious disease that their exclusion from Great Britain on the ground of health cannot be maintained. I refer the hon. Member to my full answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Sunderland on 25th May. There is no embargo on the importation to this country of live cattle from Canada for slaughter at the port of landing. Whether, when, and in what circumstances, domestic policy will allow the importation of stores born and bred in Canada, and leaving that country for the first time by direct shipment to a British port, I cannot say. In any case, fresh legislation would be required.

FOODSTUFFS (CONVEYANCE BY ROAD).

Mr. SHIRLEY BENN (*by Private Notice*) asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether an Order is being issued imposing limitations as to the distance for the delivery of goods by road; whether he is aware that the proposal is causing much anxiety, upon the ground that the effect of such Order will seriously hamper and restrict trade, and by reducing competition cause an increase in the price of foodstuffs in outlying districts where there is already a shortage and difficulty in obtaining supplies?

Mr. PARKER: The Food Controller is considering the possibility of limiting, by agreement or otherwise, the distances over

which foodstuffs may be conveyed by road in vehicles owned by competing firms. The object of this proposal is to effect a saving in fuel, feeding stuffs, horses, and manpower. He has consulted the principal firms in London and the leading Provincial centres, and the necessity for such action as a war measure has been generally recognised.

Mr. PRINGLE: Can the hon. Gentleman say in virtue of what authority the Food Controller is taking these steps, and whether, as a matter of fact, it is the Board of Trade alone that has power to deal with road transport?

Mr. PARKER: I am afraid I do not know the legal position, but I have no doubt that the Food Controller would not have so acted unless he had felt that he was acting within his power.

Mr. PRINGLE: Is it not common knowledge that none of the new Departments know what the others are doing?

Mr. SHIRLEY BENN: Before an Order is issued, will the Food Controller receive a deputation, so that he may have put before him the views of the distributing firms and their customers?

Mr. PARKER: I will put that view before the Food Controller, and endeavour to get a deputation received.

TEA.

Mr. LEIF JONES (*by Private Notice*) asked the hon. Member for Halifax, as representing the Food Controller, whether, with a view to discouraging the hoarding of existing supplies of tea, he can indicate when it is expected that the present shortage of tea will come to an end, and whether it is then intended to put any limit upon the retail price?

Mr. PARKER: It is anticipated that the present shortage of tea will be materially relieved by the end of the year. Arrangements are now being made for the purchase of tea in India and Ceylon on Government account, but the bulk of these shipments cannot reach the consumer before January. From that date onwards it is anticipated that normal supplies will again be available and that the retail price of tea will be materially reduced.

WAGES BOARDS.

10. **Mr. PATRICK WHITE** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether he will state what means of redress labouring men have whose weekly wage was reduced to three-fourths of the minimum immediately after the completion of harvesting operations: whether they should apply to the Wages Board in the district; and if he will state how many Boards will be set up in county Meath and at what centres?

Mr. DUKE: I would refer to the answer which I gave the hon. Member last Thursday. The proposals as to rates of wages which have been published by the Agricultural Wages Board will, I anticipate, be confirmed without any avoidable delay, and will then be mandatory. The Wages Board is empowered by the Corn Production Act to enforce rates of wages. The Board propose to establish one district committee for county Meath, to meet at Navan.

Mr. O'SHAUGHNESSY: Will local district committees be appointed in every county to fix the scale of wages?

Mr. DUKE: As I understand it is intended to appoint a committee in every district in Ireland. I have seen the scheme of appointment of districts, and I think it will comply with that definition.

LORD MAYOR OF DUBLIN.

15. **Mr. BYRNE** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland if an apology has yet been tendered to the Lord Mayor of Dublin by the Under-Secretary of Dublin Castle; and whether it is proposed to retire the Under-Secretary for his action towards the Lord Mayor of Dublin, who is a delegate to the Convention?

Mr. DUKE: The answer to both parts of the question, so far as my information goes, is in the negative.

Mr. BYRNE: Replies like that are calculated to cause deep resentment in Ireland. [HON. MEMBERS: "Order, order!"]

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. Member is not entitled to make observations at this stage.

Mr. BYRNE: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman if he has seen the Lord Mayor of Dublin's statement, published in the newspapers in Ireland, stating that my assertions are quite correct, and does he intend to pass them over?

Mr. DUKE: I not only have seen the newspapers, but I have seen the Lord Mayor of Dublin, whom I know quite well, and I know that he is not inviting these questions on the part of the hon. Member.

Mr. BYRNE: Then my statement is correct. [HON. MEMBERS: "Order, order!"]

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. Member has asked his question and he must take the reply.

Mr. BYRNE: I have had no reply. I think I am perfectly right in asking the question, and I have received no reply—only the usual quibbling.

DEATH OF THOMAS ASHE.

16. **Mr. BYRNE** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland if he has received a request from the jury on the Thomas Ashe inquest to attend and give evidence; and if he will accede to the request?

Mr. DUKE: I have received a letter from the Coroner enclosing a document handed by the jury to the Coroner, which appears to be founded on a supposition that I have some personal knowledge of the facts relevant to their inquiry. An answer will be made in due course.

LICENSED TRADE (IRELAND).

17. **Mr. BYRNE** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland if he is aware that a number of small licensed traders in Ireland cannot obtain their supply of stout and porter owing to the restrictions; and if he will take any action in the matter?

Mr. PARKER: I have been asked to reply. As I informed the hon. Member for West Kerry last Friday, I have every reason to believe that the requirements of small licensed traders are now being substantially met. If he will inform me of any case in which a grievance still exists, I will cause inquiries to be made.

DUBLIN TRAMWAY COMPANY (REBELLION LOSSES).

19. **Mr. NUGENT** asked the Chief Secretary if he will state what compensation the Dublin Tramway Company received from the Government or Property Losses

Committee, or both, for the loss they sustained in not running the cars during the rebellion; is he aware that the employes were not paid for the time lost through no fault of their own, although the company compelled them to pay the rents of their cottages for all that time; and will he take any action or afford any relief to the men so penalised and secure for them some compensation for the loss they sustained?

Mr. DUKE: The sum of £1,820 5s. 6d. has been paid to the Dublin United Tramways Company in respect of material damage to their property, including buildings, their contents, wiring and pillars of permanent way. The Property Losses Committee was precluded by its reference from entertaining claims for loss of wages of employes, and there are no funds at the disposal of the Irish Government for meeting such claims. The only tribunal competent to consider a claim of this character is the Defence of the Realm Losses Committee, and I understand that it will shortly hear a claim which is regarded as a test case.

FORESTRY, CYPRUS.

23. **Colonel YATE** asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies if he will state what amount has been sanctioned this year for the development of forestry in Cyprus; what area of land has been declared State forests; what laws have been issued for the protection of these forests; and what steps have been taken for the encouragement of the growth of the carob tree and other similar products of the island?

The **UNDER-SECRETARY of STATE** for the **COLONIES** (Mr. Hewins): The answers to my hon. Friend's four questions are: 1, £40,843; 2, over 700 square miles; 3, the Forest Laws of 1879, 1881, and 1889, the Fuel Ground Law of 1901, and the Goats Law of 1913; 4, improved methods of cultivation and of protection against pests have been introduced, and facilities for instruction in agriculture and forestry have been provided at various centres.

BRADFORD CONTRACT (FAIR WAGES CLAUSE).

24. **Mr. JOWETT** asked the First Commissioner of Works if he is aware that

Messrs. Wilkinson, cabinet makers, Hall Lane, Bradford, are included in the official list of Government contractors to whom contracts were given in June last, the particular contract mentioned in the list in connection with Messrs. Wilkinson being given by the Office of Works; if he is aware that Messrs. Wilkinson is in dispute with the trades union representing the organised workers in the furnishing trade on account of their refusal to sign a fair contracts clause; and if he will make inquiries and satisfy himself as to the wages and conditions of labour under which this firm is doing work for his Department?

The **FIRST COMMISSIONER OF WORKS** (Sir Alfred Mond): Messrs. Wilkinson and Sons of Bradford, who hold contracts for my Department, have signed the usual fair wages clause, and I am not aware of the dispute between them and the trades union representing the organised workers in the furnishing trade. I will, however, cause inquiry to be made into the actual rates of wages paid and conditions of labour obtaining in this firm's workshops.

ROYAL DOCKYARD APPRENTICES.

26 and 27. **Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE** asked the First Lord of the Admiralty (1) whether he is now in a position to make a statement regarding the position of apprentice boys and their allowances to parents; (2) whether he is aware that labourer boys in His Majesty's dockyards given leave to join the Army are receiving the same pay as they were entitled to as boys, although they have in many cases now become men; and whether, in view of the fact that this system limits the allowances made by the State to their parents, he can see his way to consider more generous treatment?

The **PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the ADMIRALTY** (Dr. Macnamara): Under the rules laid down by the Treasury for the Government service generally, employes who enlist in the Army whilst serving as boys are only eligible while on military service to receive the balance of their civil pay as boys, even though, while away, they attain the age at which they would have been rated as men had they remained in civil employ. I may, perhaps, remind my hon. Friend that I have already stated that on return to their dockyard duties at the close of the War, appren-

tices will be dealt with as if the time spent with the Colours had been served in the dockyards.

Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE: Is the right hon. Gentleman in a position to make any statement with regard to the allowances to parents?

Dr. MACNAMARA: No. What I am dealing with is the suggestion that the standard of civil pay should go up in consideration of things that would have happened if the boy had remained on at his work. That proposal would involve the whole of the Government civilian service now with the Colours.

SALVAGE WORK (DOVER).

28. **Mr. JOWETT** asked the Secretary to the Admiralty if he is aware that men in the Navy who are employed on a boat belonging to the Dover Harbour Board, but used by the Admiralty as an examination vessel, when called upon to perform salvage work for neutral vessels are referred by the Admiralty for salvage money to the Dover Harbour Board and on their application to the Dover Harbour Board are referred back to the Admiralty; and if he will state definitely to whom such applications should be made and see that the money is paid?

Dr. MACNAMARA: I assume that my hon. Friend's question refers to the crews of the Dover Harbour Board's tugs. These men are not "in the Navy." They are civilians serving under ordinary mercantile articles. There is no knowledge of them being referred alternately from the Admiralty and the Harbour Board. They should make application to the Harbour Board regarding all claims in respect of salvage services.

SPHAGNUM MOSS (TRANSIT).

31. **Mr. COOTE** asked the President of the Board of Trade if he will consider the possibility of permitting the collectors of sphagnum moss to have their collections carried over the railways of the United Kingdom free of charge to the military hospitals requiring the same, on the same principle as fruit and vegetables are carried to the Fleet?

The **PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the BOARD of TRADE** (Mr. Wardle): The Railway Executive Committee have

[Mr. Wardle.]

already considered applications for the free conveyance of sphagnum moss, but it has not been found possible to grant exceptional treatment to this traffic.

COAL SUPPLY.

32. Mr. RUPERT GWYNNE asked the President of the Board of Trade whether his attention has been called to the shortage of coal supplies in East Sussex, especially in the country districts around Eastbourne, where many of the coal merchants have no supplies whatever, and, as a consequence, fuel cannot be obtained even for heating the elementary schools; and if he will say if the Coal Controller will take immediate steps to arrange for a more equal distribution of coal?

Mr. WARDLE: The difficulties in this area are largely due to shortage of tonnage. Special instructions were issued some two weeks ago to all collieries supplying the area that supplies by rail must be maintained at the same rate as last year, and steps are being taken with a view to obtaining some immediate additional supplies for the area.

34. Mr. W. THORNE asked the total number of tons of coal turned out of the various collieries in the United Kingdom for the years 1916 and 1917?

Mr. WARDLE: During the year 1916 the quantity of coal raised at coal mines in the United Kingdom was 256,348,351 tons. For the first nine months of the present year the output was, approximately, 187,750,000 tons, or 5,000,000 tons less than in the corresponding period of 1916, the districts principally affected by the decrease being the exporting districts.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL.

36. Mr. T. M. HEALY asked whether it is proposed to recommit the Franchise Bill as regards the new Clauses concerning redistribution, etc., which have neither been considered in Committee nor on the First or Second Reading?

The SECRETARY of STATE for the HOME DEPARTMENT (Sir G. Cave): The procedure to be adopted is under consideration.

Sir J. LONSDALE: When will the right hon. and learned Gentleman be able to express a definite opinion regarding this matter?

Sir G. CAVE: I do not quite know, but if the hon. Gentleman puts down a question early next week I will try and answer it.

Mr. T. M. HEALY: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman take into consideration in his answer the question of discussing in Committee a subject that has never been discussed anywhere else?

Sir G. CAVE: We will consider that point.

50. Mr. T. M. HEALY asked when the names of the Irish Boundary Commissioners are to be made known; is Mr. Speaker, as in the case of England and Scotland, to be a Commissioner for Irish boundaries; and whether any opportunity of discussion on the subject is to be afforded to the House?

The CHANCELLOR of the EXCHEQUER (Mr. Bonar Law): I am glad to say Mr. Speaker has consented, at the request of the Government, to be Chairman of the Commission. The list of Commissioners will be published in a day or two with the Instructions. I hope that the House will not find it necessary to ask for further discussion on this subject.

Mr. HEALY: That, Mr. Speaker, is the first assurance we have had of anything like fair play.

Mr. O'SHAUGHNESSY: Has the right hon. Gentleman considered the fact that the Government are going to carry redistribution in Ireland against the wishes of the Irish representatives, and against the fact that it was not in the Speaker's Conference Report?

Mr. BONAR LAW: The Irish representatives have plenty of opportunity of expressing their views in this House.

Mr. O'SHAUGHNESSY: It has never been brought before the House in the shape of a Bill.

71. Mr. DUNDAS WHITE asked the Secretary for Scotland whether he has received from the Scottish branches of the United Irish League a protest against the proposal to retain the existing local government franchise for lodgers on the £10 basis, as now proposed by his Amend-

ment to a Clause of the Representation of the People Bill; and whether, in giving to this Clause as amended the further consideration promised in Committee, he will also consider the representations in that protest as to what should be the amount of the qualifying value for this franchise?

The SECRETARY for SCOTLAND (Mr. Munro): The answer to the first part of the question is in the negative. I have, however, received a copy of the document in question from my hon. and learned Friend. As regards the second part of the question, I would remind my hon. and learned Friend that the £10 basis is the existing law, and while I shall consider the representation now before me, I must point out that there are obvious difficulties in the way of adopting a different basis.

Mr. GULLAND: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that almost every sheriff in Scotland gives a different interpretation of the £10 basis?

Mr. MUNRO: That is news to me.

INTERNED PERSONS.

37. Mr. KING asked the Home Secretary whether interned persons are allowed to receive and send letters; whether visits are permitted to them; if so, under what conditions and with what frequency; and whether British subjects interned under Regulation 14B are allowed more or fewer facilities of this kind than interned enemy aliens?

Sir G. CAVE: The answer to the first two parts of the question is in the affirmative. As regards the rest of the question, interned persons are allowed to write two letters a week, and there is no restriction on the number of letters they may receive. The facilities in respect of visits vary in accordance with the conditions in the different places of internment. Speaking generally, persons interned under Regulation 14B receive the same facilities as interned enemy aliens.

Mr. BUTCHER: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman see that due precaution is taken so that these persons are not allowed to send out dangerous communications?

Sir G. CAVE: Certainly.

38. Mr. CHANCELLOR asked the Home Secretary whether a person interned under Regulation 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act is made aware of the witnesses called before the Advisory Committee; and whether he has any opportunity of confronting and cross-examining them or any subsequent opportunity of meeting the charges brought against him?

Sir G. CAVE: I would refer to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Blackburn on Monday, the 22nd instant, in which I explained the procedure of the Advisory Committee. The points mentioned in this question are in the discretion of the Committee. In many cases they could not reveal the identity of witnesses without serious risk of assisting the enemy's system of espionage, but they take care that the applicant fully understands the nature of the allegations made against him, and has ample opportunity of meeting them and of calling witnesses to support his own statements.

39. Mr. THOMAS RICHARDSON asked whether, in cases of internment under Regulation 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act, the witnesses before the Advisory Committee are put on oath?

Sir G. CAVE: The answer is in the negative.

MILITARY SERVICE.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS.

40. Mr. T. RICHARDSON asked the Home Secretary the number of times Joseph Illingworth, a conscientious objector, so found by the Central Tribunal, has been forcibly fed in Winsom Green Prison, Birmingham; what is the present state of health of this man; and whether, in view of the medical evidence given at the inquest on Thomas Ashe in Dublin, in which this practice has been described as dangerous and cruel, he will order the discontinuance of forcible feeding and order the man's release on licence?

Sir G. CAVE: Illingworth has been artificially fed since 4th September. The medical officer reports that while he is suffering from his refusal to take food in the natural way his general condition of health is fairly good, and that he takes outdoor exercise daily when the weather is suitable. Artificial feeding is a measure taken to preserve the life of a prisoner

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who would otherwise endanger his life by continued refusal of food; it is not cruel and it is never resorted to except when continued starvation is more dangerous to life. In Illingworth's case I have now under consideration the question whether the time has not come when his temporary release under the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-health) Act, 1913, should be authorised.

Commander WEDGWOOD: Why did not you think of that before?

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION.

41. Mr. JOWETT asked the Home Secretary if he is aware that there are numerous cases in which workmen disabled, or partially disabled, by accidents that happened before the commencement of the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1906, are unable to claim the war additions provided under the Workmen's Compensation (War Additions) Act, and are, in consequence, suffering hardship owing to the increase in the cost of living, which has had the effect of reducing the value of their compensation by more than one-half; and if he will take steps to remedy this treatment of those who have had the misfortune to be disabled, or partially disabled, prior to the 1st day of July, 1907?

Sir G. CAVE: My attention has been drawn to the fact that there are cases of workmen who are still receiving weekly payments under the Compensation Act of 1897 on account of total incapacity, but who are not included in the War Addition Act. I believe the number of such cases is very small, but it was not intended that they should be excluded, and I hope to be able to arrange for their being dealt with in the same way as cases under the Act of 1906.

PRISON ADMINISTRATION.

42 and 44. Mr. EDMUND HARVEY asked the Home Secretary (1) whether the prison dietary scale in force in the year 1915-16 was carefully framed to provide enough food to sustain health without allowing any needless surplus; and whether any reports were ever received from prison doctors or other authorities to suggest that it was too generous; (2) whether he has made any inquiries as to

the effect of the recent diminution and alteration of the prison dietary scale on the physique, health, and efficiency of prisoners; if so, with what result; and whether he proposes to take any further steps with regard to an improved dietary scale?

Sir G. CAVE: The prison diets in force during 1915-16 were prescribed in 1901 in pursuance of the recommendations of a Committee who considered the whole subject of diet with a view to avoiding both indulgence and excess. But at the present time the current views on the subject have had to be considerably revised for all classes of the community, and the prison population cannot be exempt from the consequences of this revision. The medical officers of the prisons are responsible for seeing that no prisoner's health suffers from any restriction of diet consequent on a general shortage of food. They have full powers to supplement the ordinary diet for any prisoner whose physical condition may require it, and they use their powers freely where necessary. Close observation maintained in all prisons since the beginning of July last does not point to any need for increasing the dietary.

Mr. HARVEY: Will the Home Secretary kindly answer that part of my first question as to whether the original dietary was so framed as to maintain health without allowing any needless surplus, and whether any reports were ever received from prison doctors, or other authorities, to suggest that it was too generous?

Sir G. CAVE: I think I have answered that.

Mr. HARVEY: It is no answer.

Sir G. CAVE: I think, if the hon. Member studies the answer, he will find I have answered his question; but I will answer it more explicitly. The answer to his first question is "Yes," and to his second "No."

43. Mr. HARVEY asked the Home Secretary whether the Prison Commissioners have considered the results obtained by the Mutual Welfare League established at Auburn and Sing Sing Prisons in New York State; and whether any attempt has recently been made to encourage similar methods in the English prison régime?

Sir G. CAVE: The Prisons Commissioners are generally acquainted with the

system in vogue at Auburn and Sing Sing. As may be gathered from the Chairman's Report on the Washington International Congress, with its Appendices, they would not be in favour of the adoption of a system which in their view does not observe the true proportions between the admitted purposes of imprisonment for crime, that it shall be both deterrent and reformatory?

LONDON EMERY WORKS.

33. Colonel FABER asked the President of the Board of Trade whether he will break all contracts entered into between the Board of Trade and Henry Randall over the London Emery Works, seeing that Randall made a false statutory declaration and did not disclose that he is related by marriage to Buchholz, who is the German agent in Belgium of the German Emery Company; whether the Board of Trade have supplied this firm with contracts and raw material and intend to continue to do so; and whether the Board will take legal proceedings against Randall for making a false statutory declaration to the effect that he was not purchasing the works in any enemy interest?

Mr. WARDLE: I am not prepared to make any statement with regard to the completion of the sale of the business of the London Emery Works to Mr. Randall pending inquiries which are being made. The Board of Trade have not given any contracts to that firm or supplied it with raw material.

Colonel FABER: Will the Board of Trade bear in mind the speech made last night by a member of the War Cabinet that German businesses ought to be wound up?

Mr. WARDLE: We are already bearing that in mind.

IRISH CONVENTION.

46. Mr. BYRNE asked the Prime Minister if his attention has been called to the leading article published in the "Northern Whig" newspaper upon the first day of the recent meetings of the Irish Convention in Belfast in which that organ repudiated the moral authority of the Convention, and described its possible recommendations as material for the waste-paper basket; and whether, in view of the provisions of the Defence of the

Realm Act limiting the freedom of the Press in connection with the proceedings of the Convention, the Government propose to permit a recurrence of such events?

Mr. DUKE: I am advised that the publication in question did not constitute an offence under the Defence of the Realm Regulations.

Mr. BYRNE: Seeing that the "Northern Whig" is controlled by certain prominent members of the Convention, is it in the interests of the Convention that such articles should be allowed to go unheeded?

Mr. DUKE: There is nothing about the ownership of the "Northern Whig" in the question. I have not the least idea who controls the journal. I only know I do not control it.

POLITICAL FUNDS.

45. Captain WRIGHT asked the Prime Minister whether he will take the requisite legislative or administrative action to insure the yearly publication at Somerset House of the investments, with the names of the trustees in whom they are vested, belonging to the various political parties and all contributions made to the party funds, with the names of the contributors?

Mr. BONAR LAW: The answer is in the negative.

Captain WRIGHT: Has my right hon. Friend, in giving that answer, considered that at the present time, when there is so much political reform in the air, it would not be in the interests of Parliamentary government and of the political parties that the proposals in the question should be adopted, and whether the present Coalition Government is not particularly well fitted to attend to this matter?

Mr. BONAR LAW: There is a good deal to be said for the view expressed by my hon. Friend, but I cannot look upon this as a War measure.

ENEMY AIR RAIDS.

49. Major WHELER asked whether, when agricultural live stock has been destroyed by the action of hostile aircraft, it is proposed to compensate owners for the losses that they have sustained?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I will see that this point is considered in connection with the new Government scheme for insurance against damage by aircraft.

RELIEF OF DISTRESS.

52. **Mr. GILBERT** asked the Prime Minister what steps the Government have taken in order to grant immediate financial relief to people whose homes and property may be destroyed and ruined by enemy air raids and some existing Government Department be authorised to deal with the same; and will he indemnify all local authorities for any urgent grants or expenses that they may spend on such cases?

The PRESIDENT of the LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD (Mr. Hayes Fisher): I have been asked to answer this question. The local committees which have been established to deal with the prevention and relief of distress due to the War have been authorised in the case of air raid distress to grant immediate financial relief up to an amount equivalent to the amount of the Army separation allowances, and in special cases to make supplementary allowances. Small grants may be given at once pending investigation of the needs of the case. They have also been authorised to defray the funeral expenses of victims of the raids, to make special grants for medical or surgical treatment, and to replace essential articles of furniture and clothing. Grants for these purposes are made out of the National Relief Fund and the Mansion House Fund upon the recommendation of the Government Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress, and the local committees are fully aware that any applications made by them for such grants will be dealt with promptly. The committees, as a rule, have funds already in hand, and any expenditure properly incurred by them would, of course, be refunded.

The provision which has been made for the relief of air raid distress was discussed at length at a recent Conference at the Local Government Board with the Mayors and other representatives of the local authorities in the Metropolitan area, and the members of the Conference expressed their satisfaction with the measures which had been taken. I may add that the question of compensation from public funds for damage to property caused by enemy air raids is under consideration by the Treasury.

Mr. GILBERT: Has the right hon. Gentleman any information from a certain district where a raid took place last week that nothing has been done except what has been done by voluntary effort in that district as regards relief? Will the right hon. Gentleman take steps to see whether he can get the local committee to which he referred to take action in the matter at once?

Mr. FISHER: If the local committee has done nothing, the local committee has singularly failed in carrying out its duty.

Mr. HOGGE: Can the right hon. Gentleman say, with regard to his answer which deals with the granting of relief up to the amount of separation allowance, whether there is any limit to that in the case of casualties, and does that become a pension; and, if so, is he aware of the inequality between the pension awarded for casualties in air raids and that for death in the War?

Mr. FISHER: If casualties result in permanent injury, that permanent injury will be compensated for on the lines of the Workmen's Compensation Act.

Mr. HOGGE: It is not a question of compensation for injury. Can my right hon. Friend say if the husband, for instance, is killed, will the widow get a grant equivalent to the existing separation allowance; and, if so, has he taken into consideration the fact that that is different from the pension given in the case of the death of a man in the War?

Mr. FISHER: I think that is a detailed question of which I ought to have adequate notice.

NIGHT WARNINGS.

The following question stood on the Paper in the name of **Mr. GILBERT:**

58. To ask the Home Secretary whether, in view of the air raid last Friday, he has further considered the question of night warnings for London and district; and can he now state definitely what warnings will be given in case of air raids after dark and what will be the all-clear signal?

Mr. GILBERT: The answer to this question has been postponed until Tuesday. May I ask whether, if a decision be come to before Tuesday, in view of the anxiety on this question, the right hon. Gentleman will have a public statement issued?

Sir G. CAVE: Certainly.

UNITED DAIRIES, LIMITED.

53. **Captain WRIGHT** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the permission recently granted by the Treasury to the United Dairies, Limited, a combine of wholesale dealers in which the Nestlé and the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company is a shareholder, to increase their capital to £4,000,000 was given in the interests of the milk producer, the milk consumer, or in whose interest; and if he will state the reasons for giving this permission?

Mr. BONAR LAW: No application has been made to, or permission granted by, the Treasury with reference to an increase of capital by this company.

EUGEN KAMMER.

57. **Colonel FABER** asked the Home Secretary why Eugen Kammer, an unnaturalised German, was allowed, after his firm had been wound up, when he was Kammer and Company, Limited, to reopen in his daughter's name as S. and C. Kammer in Fenchurch Street?

Mr. WARDLE: My right hon. Friend has asked me to answer this question. The daughters of Eugen Kammer, in whose name the business referred to is being carried on, are British subjects, but I am having further inquiries made in order to ascertain whether Kammer is concerned in the business.

Mr. REDDY: Will the hon. Gentleman inquire into the antecedents of Lord Milner?

ENEMY ALIENS.

59. **Mr. O'LEARY** asked the Home Secretary whether Alfonso Palcic, recently arrested in Dublin and interned, belongs to a disaffected Slav race under Austrian rule; whether he is aware that before his arrest a policeman, purporting to act under written authority, endeavoured to intimidate Palcic into enlisting for military service against the country of which he is technically a subject by falsely informing him that he could and would be conscripted if he did not enlist; that the policeman subsequently produced a document which he alleged to be an authority from the Secretary of State for the Home Department and read from it a

passage stating that Palcic must prove that he is a friendly alien by enlisting in the British Army or else must be interned; whether at the date of this interview with the police officer there were, and still are, permitted to be at large in Dublin ordinary alien enemy subjects, being males of military age, and not belonging to disaffected races under enemy rule; and whether it is now the policy of the Government to allow a number of ordinary alien enemy subjects to be at large without any proof being required of their friendly dispositions, but to intern all alien enemy subjects belonging to disaffected races under enemy rule unless they prove their friendly dispositions by enlisting in the British Army?

Sir G. CAVE: The answer to the last part of the question is in the negative. As to the remainder of the question, I must refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him yesterday.

Mr. O'LEARY: Why is this man interned? Is it by way of punishment for non-enlistment?

Sir G. CAVE: No, Sir; by no means. I think the hon. Gentleman will find the information in a written answer which I gave him yesterday.

MR. PHILIP LASZLO (INTERNMENT).

60. **Mr. G. FABER** asked the Home Secretary what was the date of Mr. Laszlo's application for naturalisation, and whether his application was supported by any British subject; and, if so, by whom; whether when or after the Home Secretary made the Order for Mr. Laszlo's internment representations were made to him by persons in this country other than Mr. Laszlo's professional advisers in order to secure his release; and, if so, by whom?

Sir G. CAVE: Mr. Laszlo's application for naturalization was received by the Home Office on the 28th July, 1914, and, in accordance with the prescribed procedure, was supported by formal declarations as to his respectability and loyalty made by four natural-born British subjects. These declarations were made several days before the application was sent in. It is not the practice to give the names of the declarants, but, as the present case is exceptional, I see no objec-

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tion to stating that they were my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for the Fareham Division of Hampshire, Lord Devonport, and Sir Howard Guinness. I have received no representations on Mr. Laszlo's behalf other than his own statement which was submitted to the Advisory Committee.

61. **Mr. G. FABER** asked the Home Secretary where Mr. Laszlo has been interned since the Order for his internment was made; whether he has enjoyed any exceptional indulgences or has experienced the treatment usual in such cases; whether the Advisory Committee have sent in their Report to him on Mr. Laszlo's appeal against his internment; and whether he can state when he will announce his decision?

Sir G. CAVE: Mr. Laszlo has been interned in Brixton Prison. He has been accorded no exceptional indulgences, and has received the treatment usual in cases of persons interned under Defence of the Realm Regulation 14B. I have considered the Committee's Report, and, in accordance with their advice, have decided to confirm the Order for his internment. I may add that, following the Committee's recommendation, I propose to reconsider the case in December.

NAVAL AND MILITARY PENSIONS AND GRANTS.

62. **Mr. BYRNE** asked the Pensions Minister if he is aware of the dissatisfaction that exists owing to the number of wounded soldiers discharged on small, inadequate pensions; if he is aware that in Ireland there are many cases in which soldiers were discharged with 4s. 8d. pension who are unfit for employment and have to seek assistance from their friends; if he will see that the lowest pension shall be 7s. 6d. per week for soldiers discharged unfit; and if he will say when widows' pensions will be increased?

Mr. PRATT (Lord of the Treasury): The lowest pension to an invalided soldier whose disability is attributable to, or aggravated by, service is 5s. 6d. a week, but that would only be in cases where the disablement is small, interfering but little with the man's powers. The pensions granted to wounded soldiers are on a

generous scale, recently approved by the House. The cases to which the hon. Member refers, where 4s. 6d. only is given, are cases where the disability, almost always disease and not injury, has been found to be neither due to nor aggravated by service. In such cases a man has a right of appeal to the Special Tribunal which has been set up, and if his case succeeds he will receive the pension appropriate to his state of disablement. I regret that I am not in a position to answer the last part of the question.

63. **Mr. HOGGE** asked the Pensions Minister whether there is any limit in time to the Appeal Tribunal against the award of a gratuity; and, if so, what is the length of time, and on whose authority was it fixed?

Mr. PRATT: There is no limit in time to an appeal in such circumstances, but it is obvious that in case of a delayed appeal it is much more difficult to establish the connection between a man's present disability and his service, and that delay in appeal must prejudice a man's chances. It is, therefore, the practice to advise men who are granted gratuities because the disability is not considered due to service to apply to their local committees within thirty days if they wish to appeal.

Mr. HOGGE: Will my hon. Friend see that the circular sent out to the soldiers is altered? Is he aware that the circular says that they must appeal within thirty days whereas there is no justification at all in law for the authorities saying that?

Mr. PRATT: I will convey the substance of my hon. Friend's remarks to the Pensions Minister.

64. **Mr. HOGGE** asked the Pensions Minister whether his attention has been called to the fact that the War Pensions Sub-committee, Sydenham, London, S.E., is housed in the same building and shares the offices of the district branch of the Charitable Organisation Society, 84, Kirkdale, Sydenham; whether he is aware that the signboards of the two appear one over the other on the gate and door; and whether he will take steps to remove this association of the two bodies?

Mr. PRATT: I am obliged to the hon. Member for having brought this matter to my notice, and I am communicating with the London War Pensions Committee.

Mr. HOGGE: Does the hon. Gentleman mean that if the facts are as stated in the question that he will separate the two functions in that neighbourhood?

Mr. PRATT: My hon. Friend had better give notice.

87. Mr. MONTAGUE BARLOW asked the Under-Secretary of State for War, with regard to the case of Private **W. Martin**, No. 291,836, 3rd Monmouthshire Regiment, whose mother lives at 26, Waterloo Street, off Oldfield Road, Salford, whether he is aware that this soldier joined up in October, 1916, twelve months ago, but, though the boy has allotted his mother regularly 3s. 6d. a week, not one penny of allowance has been paid her in respect of him; and if he will ascertain whether this delay of twelve months is due to the neglect of the pensions officer at Manchester or to the Paymaster's Department in London?

The **FINANCIAL SECRETARY** to the **WAR OFFICE** (Mr. Forster): Inquiries are being made, and I will inform the hon. Member of the result when I am in a position to do so.

88. Mr. BARLOW asked the Under-Secretary of State for War, with regard to the case of Private **W. Leech**, No. 46241, 48th Training Reserve Battalion, whose mother lives at 18, Corbett Street, Liverpool Road, Salford, whether he is aware that though he joined up in May she has received his allotment but no Government allowance; and whether, in view of the fact that no Government payment has been made for six months, he will have the matter inquired into to see whether this delay is the fault of the Pension Officer or of the Pay Office?

Mr. FORSTER: This claim was sent by the Pay Office to the Pension Officer in May last, and has not yet been returned.

AIR SERVICES.

AEROPLANE ENGINES.

67. Colonel Sir NORTON-GRIFFITHS asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Air Board, if he will say what steps are being taken to rectify the shortage of spares for aeroplane engines; and if he will state who is responsible for this situation?

Sir WORTHINGTON EVANS (Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Munitions): I have been asked to answer this question. There is no general shortage of aero-engine spares. Shortages occur at times, for special reasons, in connection with individual spare parts. Emergencies of this nature are met, when they arise, by making the best use of the resources at the disposal of the Ministry.

68. Sir N. GRIFFITHS asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Air Board whether any delays occur to manufacturers in the output of aeroplane engines by or through inspectors responsible for the testing of engines refusing to test on Saturdays and Sundays; and, if so, whether the Air Board will make the necessary arrangements, either by paying double overtime or putting additional men on, to remedy this state of affairs?

Sir W. EVANS: I am informed that no delays have occurred in the output of aeroplane engines through the refusal of inspectors responsible for the testing of engines to test on Saturdays and Sundays. When the conditions of output are such that additional inspection staff is required, the extra staff is provided, either permanently or temporarily, as may be necessary.

FORESTRY COMMISSION (SCOTLAND).

69. Colonel STIRLING asked the Secretary for Scotland whether **Mr. J. D. Sutherland**, Forestry Commissioner to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland, has permanently or temporarily vacated his appointment; and, if so, what is the name of his successor or substitute and what are his professional qualifications and experience?

Mr. MUNRO: There is no appointment of Forestry Commissioner to the Board, and no such appointment has, therefore, been vacated. Colonel Sutherland was, however, in general charge of the forestry work of the Board, and during his absence on important military duty the supervision of that work has been temporarily placed in the hands of **Dr. Greig**, one of the Commissioners of the Board. He has the advantage of the same skilled assistance as was available to Colonel Sutherland in the person of **Dr. Borthwick**, Forestry advisory officer to the Board. I may add that I am at

[Mr. Munro.]
present taking steps with a view to increasing the Board's skilled forestry staff.

Mr. TENNANT: Are we to understand that Colonel Sutherland's appointment in France is purely temporary, and upon that ceasing he will return as a Commissioner to the Board of Agriculture?

Mr. MUNRO: That is my understanding.

IRISH STORE CATTLE.

72. Major LANE-FOX asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food on what ground it is more difficult to limit the price of Irish store cattle than that of fat cattle; and what increase in the cost of producing such cattle has justified their price having doubled during the War?

Mr. PARKER: The absence of adequate weighing facilities in Ireland makes it difficult to limit the price of live cattle in that country; and the difficulty is increased in the case of store cattle by the impossibility of clearly distinguishing which cattle are fat and which are stores. If the hon. Member can suggest a practical method of limiting the price of stores which will satisfy the agricultural experts, the suggestion will be welcomed. I am not clear that the increased prices of store cattle since the commencement of the War have been justified by the increased cost of production.

Mr. O'SHAUGHNESSY: Is it not a fact that the price of store cattle is regulated by the price of fat cattle, and the price of store cattle is generally from 5s. to 6s. per cwt. less than the price of fat cattle?

Mr. ARCHDALE: If it is not the case that if store cattle prices are reduced below the price at which they can be profitably produced, the small farmers of Ireland, who produce nineteen-twentieths of the stores, will stop producing, and so lessen the supply of food.

Mr. FLAVIN: Is he aware—

Mr. SPEAKER: It has already been pointed out that the hon. Member is answering on behalf of a colleague, and he is not in a position to reply to these conundrums.

LIVE STOCK (RATIONS).

73. Major LANE-FOX asked whether it is proposed shortly to ration the live stock of this country; whether any workable scheme has been arrived at which has received the approval of any practical agriculturists; and whether he will consider the desirability, in view of mistakes already made, of putting the farmers of the country on their honour in the matter, rather than attempting to harass them by Regulations which cannot be effectively enforced?

Mr. PARKER: Owing to the supply of feeding stuffs being unequal to the demand, it will only be possible to prevent prices rising by taking steps to enforce fair distribution. Lord Rhondda has appointed a Central Feeding Stuffs Distribution Committee, including representative farmers and representatives of the three Departments of agriculture, to advise him as to the best method of controlling distribution. Any system of rationing which may be adopted will be devised primarily in the interests of stock owners themselves, and care will be taken to see that they are not harassed by Regulations which cannot effectively be enforced. In the meantime, farmers will be serving their own interests collectively by being as sparing as possible in the feeding of cattle food to other than dairy cows.

Mr. FLAVIN: Would not the best means of rationing cattle be to reduce the price of cattle food, which has increased by over 300 per cent. since the War began?

Mr. PARKER: Probably it would be, but I do not think it lies within the power of the Food Controller to reduce the price of cattle food.

Mr. O'SHAUGHNESSY: Is the hon. Member aware that if you ration cattle you can have no fat cattle?

CITY OF DUBLIN STEAM PACKET COMPANY.

82 and 83. Mr. CLANCY asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Shipping Controller (1) whether two of the cargo boats of the City of Dublin Steamship Company which have been requisitioned by the Government were ordered on Monday to return on Monday from Liverpool and Manchester unloaded; if so, why, especially in view of the fact that all available tonnage is

required for traffic between Irish and English ports; and whether similar orders are to be given in future; (2) whether the cargo boats of the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company have been requisitioned by the Government and ordered to be handed over to the representative of the Ministry of Shipping in Dublin; and, if so, why the boats of this Dublin company are to be taken out of the control of their owners, who are ready to obey any orders of the Government, while the boats of the London and North-Western Railway Company, to which the City of Dublin boats are to be handed over, are left under the control of that company though requisitioned; whether the representative in Dublin of the Ministry of Shipping has intimated that he intended to appoint captains, officers, and crews either from the existing staff or otherwise at his discretion; whether the Shipping Controller has contemplated the dangers likely to arise from the throwing out of employment of a large number of men with families, including men working on shore in Dublin; and whether, in view of all the circumstances, the Shipping Controller will see the advisability of dealing with the City of Dublin boats in the same way as the railway company's boats have been dealt with and, particularly, whether he will see that the men employed by the City of Dublin Company will not suffer by any change that may be made?

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the MINISTRY of SHIPPING (Sir Leo Chiozza Money): The City of Dublin Steam Packet Company laid up the four vessels of their fleet which were urgently required to convey cattle and foodstuffs from Ireland to England, and disregarded the orders sent to them to dispatch the vessels. The result was injury to Irish interest, congestion of the port of Dublin, delay in the transport of the cattle and foodstuffs, together with loss and deterioration. In these circumstances, the only course open to the Controller was to requisition the vessels and entrust them to a management which could be relied upon to employ them promptly and in accordance with orders. Moreover, the deterioration and congestion of the perishable cargoes in Dublin necessitated the immediate return of some of the vessels without waiting for full return cargoes, at the inevitable expense of further delaying non-perishable cargoes from England. The Controller is anxious to retain the services

of the officers and crews, and has at no time had any intention of throwing them out of employment. He will consider at a later date whether the management of the vessels can be restored to the owners on receiving adequate assurances that the vessels will be properly employed; but in the meantime he is bound to take measures which will put an immediate stop to the deplorable loss and injury which have been caused by the action of the company in laying up the vessels.

Mr. CLANCY: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the managing director of the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company absolutely denies the statement that they held up the vessels unreasonably? They only waited for formal requisition, and they were prevented from sailing by orders of the Government themselves?

Sir CHIOZZA MONEY: My hon. and learned Friend will find, on inquiry, that this company was the only company of those concerned to hold up their vessels. The other companies obeyed the reasonable orders given to them, and the action of this company resulted in the loss of valuable food, and cattle dying in Dublin.

Mr. CLANCY: Does the hon. Gentleman know that, as a matter of fact, the other companies which, as he says, obeyed the orders of the Government were guaranteed against loss, and the only company that was not guaranteed against loss was the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company?

Sir CHIOZZA MONEY: My hon. and learned Friend is misinformed. That is not the case. The companies which owned the other vessels, with the exception of the London and North-Western Railway Company, had no guarantees other than that given to the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company. The London and North-Western Railway Company were in a different position, because they were a railway company whose property came under the control of the Government at the beginning of the War.

Mr. T. M. HEALY: If this charge—and a more serious charge was never made—is true, why is it not being prosecuted like the Sinn Feiners?

Sir CHIOZZA MONEY: The punishment is that the vessels have been temporarily taken out of their hands and put into the hands of those willing to manage them.

Mr. CLANCY: The hon. Gentleman has not answered one point, which is very important, in view of the statements made in Dublin. The question is, whether or not the people employed by the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company on their vessels are to be retained or dismissed, as the manager of the London and North-Western Railway Company, who is also the representative of the Shipping Controller in Ireland, has intimated the possibility of dispensing with them at his discretion?

Sir CHIOZZA MONEY: My hon. and learned Friend will find, on reading the answer which I endeavoured to make clear, that there is no intention of dismissing the employes of this company.

Mr. CLANCY: There is one further question which I desire to ask in the general interest. Is there any intention on the part of the Government to use these vessels for any purpose other than the purposes of Irish trade?

Sir CHIOZZA MONEY: Certainly not. The sole purpose of requisitioning the vessels was to restore the Irish trade, which was held up temporarily by the action of the company.

GREAT BRITAIN AND EASTERN ALLIES.

NO SEPARATE PEACE.

STATEMENT BY LORD R. CECIL.

Mr. PENNEFATHER (*by Private Notice*) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether his attention has been called to the impression which prevails in many circles in Russia and Roumania that the Western Powers are contemplating a separate peace at the expense of Russia, and whether he can make any statement on the subject?

The **MINISTER of BLOCKADE** (Lord Robert Cecil): I am glad to have this opportunity of giving a categorical denial on behalf of His Majesty's Government to this imputation, which has been fostered by enemy agents in Russia, in the hope of producing a discouraging effect upon our Eastern Allies. His Majesty's Government are determined to abide by their Russian Allies, and to assist them in consolidating their new-found liberty.

His Majesty's Government realise also the great debt which they owe to the Roumanian Government and Army, and they fully appreciate the valiant resistance which our Roumanian Ally is offering in a period of exceptional difficulty and trial. The Roumanian people may rest assured that this country will not desert them in the present crisis.

RUSSIA.

1. **Mr. KING** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he has received official information that Russia has been declared a republic; and whether His Majesty's Government has recognised the Russian republic?

Lord R. CECIL: No, Sir.

Land Purchase (Ireland).

2. **Mr. O'LEARY** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether the Estates Commissioners have at present in their possession large tracts of untenanted and uncultivated land; and whether they will give forthwith a suitable and proper holding to Daniel Cronin, of Donemark, Bantry, an evicted tenant?

Mr. DUKE: The application of Daniel Cronin, of Glengarriff Road, Bantry, for reinstatement in a holding formerly occupied by him, and now in the occupation of another tenant, was lodged after the date prescribed in the Evicted Tenants Act, 1917, and the applicant therefore does not come within the class of evicted tenants for whom the Estates Commissioners had power to provide holdings under that Act.

Mr. O'LEARY: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Estates Commissioners encouraged this man in the belief that they would ultimately give him the holding?

Mr. DUKE: I am not aware of anything beyond the facts I have stated.

5. **Mr. O'LEARY** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland what steps, if any, are being taken by the Estates Commissioners to reinstate in a suitable holding David N. Gallagher, of Kilcoe, Skibbereen, an evicted tenant?

Mr. DUKE: As I informed the hon. Member, on 12th July, the Estates Com-

missioners have noted David N. Gallagher's name for consideration in the allotment of untenanted land, but at present they have no untenanted land on which they could provide a holding for him.

11. **Mr. P. WHITE** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland for the total amount advanced in cash and stock, respectively, during each of the last three financial years by the Estates Commissioners; and whether he will state the quantity of untenanted land at present in their possession in county Meath, the quantity they have already distributed in the county, and the quantity, if any, that they are at present negotiating the purchase of?

Mr. DUKE: I will circulate the greater part of this answer. In county Meath the Commissioners have distributed 12,684 acres of untenanted land, and excluding woods, turbary, and water, 521 acres are in their possession, and proceedings are pending for the purchase of 1,382 acres.—
[See Written Answer.]

Technical Education (Ireland).

3. **Mr. BOLAND** asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether any portion of the equivalent Grant for Irish education provided in connection with the Grant under the Bill of the Minister of Education has been made available for technical education in Ireland; and, if so, what is the amount?

9. **Mr. BRADY** asked whether the Chief Secretary has received the resolution of the Irish Technical Congress adopted at their recent meeting in Dublin, on the motion of the chairman of the Cork Technical Instruction Committee, seconded by the chairman of the Belfast Committee, pointing out the absolute necessity for prompt action in the further development of technical education in Ireland and the special prominence given by the War to the importance of technical education, and stating that the technical education schemes in Ireland were debarred from much needed development through want of funds; and whether he has taken any steps to provide the needed funds for technical education?

12. **Mr. HEARN** asked a question in similar terms.

Mr. DUKE: As I stated yesterday, proposals for the further development of technical education in Ireland are at pre-

sent under consideration. I have received a copy of the resolution referred to in the questions of the hon. Members for St. Stephen's Green and South County Dublin.

Mr. DONOVAN: Arising out of the reply, am I to understand that the entire amount of the Irish equivalent Grant will be applied exclusively to the payment of the salaries of the school teachers?

Mr. DUKE: I must ask the hon. Member to put that question down.

National School Teachers (Ireland).

18. **Mr. COOTE** asked the Chief Secretary if, in his new scheme of salaries to teachers under the National Board, junior assistant mistresses who heretofore have been paid by capitation will now be paid by salaries; and if he will say when the details of the new scheme will be published and the date from which it will be operative?

Mr. DUKE: The junior assistant-mistresses referred to in the question would under the proposed new scheme receive a capitation grant of £1 per annum on the average attendances of all pupils (boys and girls), instead of on the average attendance of girls only. This Grant is exclusive of the supplemental Grant of £4 payable annually in arrear to all junior assistant-mistresses who have completed two years' efficient service. The Supplementary Vote of £384,000 for the current financial year has been granted on the understanding that the new scales of salaries, etc., shall be operative as from 1st April last. As regards the publication of the details of the new scheme I must refer to the answer I gave to a question of the hon. Member for East Mayo last Thursday.

Prisoners' Antecedents.

35. **Mr. KING** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has considered the observations of the judge at the Central Criminal Court on 20th October that the practice of taking loose information from the police about the past history of accused persons is an evil one; and whether he will issue a circular urging that the practice shall be discontinued?

Sir G. CAVE: The remarks made by his honour Judge Atherley Jones referred to the practice by which after the conviction of a prisoner a responsible officer of

[Sir G. Cave.]
 police informs the Court as to the prisoner's character and antecedents. This practice has been specifically approved by the Court of Criminal Appeal, who pointed out that, where such information is disputed by a prisoner, it is open to the judge either to adjourn the matter for further inquiry, or to ignore the information, and state that he does not take it into account in passing sentence. The views of the Court of Criminal Appeal on the subject were fully set out in a circular issued by the Home Office in 1912, a copy of which I will send to the hon. Member. I see no reason for the issue of a further circular.

Mr. KING: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Judge Atherley Jones said that he gave no heed at all to this kind of police information?

Sir G. GAVE: I noticed at one stage of the case His Honour said that. Subsequently he did take heed of the information.

Mr. R. McNEILL: Which does the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider the higher authority, Judge Jones or the Court of Criminal Appeal?

Sir G. CAVE: I leave that to my hon. Friend.

Divorce Law Reform.

51. **Major E. WOOD** asked the Prime Minister whether it is the intention of His Majesty's Government to introduce legislation in the present Session for the amendment of the marriage laws in the direction of granting extended facilities for divorce?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I cannot add anything to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for South Kerry yesterday on this subject.

Elementary Education (Catholic Children).

70. **Mr. BOLAND** asked the Secretary for Scotland whether he is aware that the Catholic soldier's wife in Glasgow is legally compelled, like other citizens, to pay rates to assist to give free books to children in Board schools belonging to families where the household income is limited to the War Office allowance; that by a decision, on 11th October, of the Glasgow School Board, which receives thousands of pounds from Catholic rate-

payers, this body refuses to give free books to Catholic children in similar circumstances; and what legal action he proposes to take to compel the School Board to mete out equal treatment in the matter of free books to all children of men in the Forces of the Crown who are resident in Glasgow, irrespective of the creed of the children?

Mr. MUNRO: I have seen in the Press a report of the meeting of the Glasgow School Board, at which this matter was discussed. I would refer my hon. Friend to the terms of Sub-section (6) of Section 3 of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1908, from which he will see that the granting of free books is a matter entirely within the discretion of the School Board. I have no power of intervention.

BILL PRESENTED.

COAL MINES CONTROL AGREEMENT (CONFIRMATION) BILL.—“to confirm and give effect to a certain agreement relating to the compensation to be paid in respect of the control of Coal Mines and other matters arising out of such control,” presented by Sir ALBERT STANLEY; supported by Mr. Wardle and Sir Gordon Hewart; to be read a second time upon Monday next, and to be printed.

WRITTEN ANSWERS.

WAR.

CUSTOMS AND EXCISE DEPARTMENT.

Mr. DUNCAN asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is aware of the congestion of business in the outdoor branch of the Customs and Excise Department; whether he has considered in relation therewith the various cases of death or breakdown of members of that branch, where the demands of official business have been very heavy; whether he is satisfied that the Board of Customs and Excise have taken all the steps in their power to relieve the strain; whether he will instruct the Board of Customs and Excise when formulating schemes for doing new and old work to consider them

more closely than hitherto, from the point of view of saving labour to the already heavily pressed outdoor officials; whether he will direct the Board of Customs and Excise to hold special inquiry into the pressure of work in the outdoor service, with a view to obviating a general breakdown which threatens it; and, if so, will he direct that representatives of the federation representing the officers' interests shall be appointed to the committee of inquiry?

Mr. BALDWIN: The whole staff of the Customs and Excise Department, indoor and outdoor, has been heavily pressed during the War, but relief has been obtained in every possible way—*e.g.*, by utilising superannuated officials, introducing women and other temporary assistance, and decreasing the ordinary revenue work. The number of deaths and retirements on the ground of ill-health is not above the normal, and there is no sign that the general health of the staff is being undermined, much less that a general breakdown is imminent. There is, therefore, no necessity for the general inquiry suggested by the hon. Member, but I can assure him that the Board of Customs and Excise are doing all in their power to prevent any undue strain being thrown on their staff.

FOOD SUPPLIES.

TILLAGE (IRELAND).

Mr. FITZPATRICK asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland what steps the Department of Agriculture intend taking against landowners in the Ossory Division of Queen's County who failed to carry out the compulsory tillage Regulations of this year; and whether any steps will be taken by the Government to provide town tenants, labourers, and landless men requiring allotments for the production of food?

Mr. DUKE: Occupiers of arable land who, without reasonable cause, failed to comply with the Defence of the Realm Regulations in regard to the cultivation of their holdings are being given an opportunity of undertaking to plough up the areas in default by a specified date before the end of this year. In a considerable number of cases undertakings have been given. In the event of an occupier failing to give, or comply with, such an undertaking, the Department of Agriculture will take action under the Regulations to enforce the requisite cultivation.

BREAD PRICES (ISLE OF MAN).

Mr. DUNCAN asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food what negotiations took place between the authorities in the Isle of Man and himself for the reduction of the price of the loaf to 9d.; whether he can give the dates of the commencing and the completion of such negotiations; and can he state the cause of the delay in sanctioning the insular expenditure required?

Sir G. CAVE: My hon. Friend has asked me to reply to this question. No negotiations have taken place between the Imperial and Insular Governments on this subject. In reply to inquiries made last August by the Governor as to the position of the Isle of Man in regard to the nine-penny loaf, His Majesty's Government replied that they were not aware of any reason why the scheme should be extended to the island at the expense of the British taxpayer, but promised any assistance in its power if the island decided to adopt a similar scheme at the expense of the island. Early this month the Court of Tynwald, after an inquiry by a Committee of the Court, voted a sum of £20,000 from the accumulated funds of the island for the purpose of reducing the price of the loaf for six months. This resolution has been submitted for the approval of the Government, and a decision will be announced very shortly.

SPIRITS (EXPORT).

Mr. MILLAR asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether the use of any tonnage has been sanctioned by him during the past year for the export of spirits and rum from this country; and whether tonnage is still being allocated for the export of spirits and rum?

Mr. PARKER: In reply to the hon. Member's question, the Food Controller has not requested the allocation of any tonnage for export of spirits or rum.

WAR PENSIONS COMMITTEE (CORK).

Major NEWMAN asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether he is aware of the dissatisfaction felt in Cork at the expenses incurred by the local war pensions committee, which amount to £1,697 10s., and which include salary of

secretary for ten weeks, £315; investigator and assistant, £225; rent, furniture, telephone, and heating, £450; hire of motor cars, £70; and loss of remunerative time, £270; and whether, before allowing the ratepayers to be charged in the first instance with so large a sum, he will advise the Secretary of State for War to have an audit made of the expenses incurred by the committee and a Report made to the local authorities for their consideration?

Mr. DUKE: The Naval and Military War Pensions, etc. (Administrative Expenses), Act, 1917, provides that the estimate of the administrative expenses of war pensions committees shall be forwarded for the approval of the Local Government Board by the local councils for whose areas the war pensions committees were established, with a notification of their approval or modification of the estimates as they may think fit. In the case of the Cork War Pensions Committee the estimate has not yet been forwarded by the Corporation of Cork to the Local Government Board for approval, and I am not aware whether the corporation have dealt with it. I will consider what action, if any, is necessary when I have the facts before me.

CLYDE SHIPBUILDERS (ADMIRALTY APPRECIATION).

Mr. G. LAMBERT asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether any acknowledgment has been made to the workers on the Clyde who were responsible for the building, with accuracy and expedition, of the naval gunboats, without which Bagdad would not have been captured?

Dr. MACNAMARA: Yes, Sir; a letter was sent expressing the high appreciation of the Admiralty. The gunboats materially assisted in the operations resulting in the capture of Bagdad.

PRIVATE SOLDIER (RELATIVES' INQUIRIES).

Mr. BUXTON asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he will cause inquiries to be made regarding Private E. J. Wheeler, No. 6749, B Company, 10th Battalion, Queen's Royal West Surrey, whose letters have for several

weeks been returned with the superscription, "Wounded," but whose relatives have received no other intimation of his condition and have failed to obtain any acknowledgment of the inquiries addressed to the competent authorities on the subject?

Mr. MACPHERSON: No casualty to this soldier has been reported to the War Office, but an inquiry has been sent overseas with regard to him. I am not sure to what inquiries my hon. Friend refers, but I have not been able so far to trace any inquiry received in the War Office earlier than the 16th instant, and these have been answered.

WAR DEPARTMENT LAND PURCHASE.

Mr. DUNDAS WHITE asked the Under-Secretary of State for War what was the acreage and what was being taken as the annual value for rating at the time the property of about 2,000 acres which, as mentioned in paragraph 40 of the Report of the Committee of Public Accounts, was purchased for £70,000 in 1912?

Mr. MACPHERSON: The annual value for rating purposes of the property conveyed to the Department amounted to £1,265 2s. 6d., and the area conveyed was 2,655 acres.

FIELD PRISONS AND PUNISHMENT.

Mr. T. RICHARDSON asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he will state the number of detention barracks, military prisons, and field punishment barracks which have been set up under the control of the British military authorities since August, 1914, adjacent to the various areas of military operations abroad, and the number of prisoners these various descriptions of prisons are able to accommodate; and whether he will state the nature of the punishments authorised to be inflicted upon men who are fighting for their country?

Mr. MACPHERSON: There are no detention barracks, military prisons, or field punishment barracks, in the proper sense of the terms, in the areas of military operations abroad. There are, however, certain establishments known as "military prisons in the field," but I regret that it is not in the public interest to state the

accommodation available. With regard to the expression used by the hon. Member, "field punishment barracks," possibly the hon. Member has in his mind the arrangements which may be carried out under the provisions of sub-paragraph 5 of the Rules for Field Punishment made under Section 44 of the Army Act. In regard to the latter part of the hon. Member's question, the nature of the punishments authorised to be inflicted upon soldiers of the British Army will be found by reference to the Army Act.

CABLE CENSORSHIP.

Major NEWMAN asked the Under-Secretary of State for War (1) whether there are any ex-commissioned officers, who applied for employment on the outbreak of war, now serving as deputy assistant censors on the cable censorship, who, though rated as civilians, and consequently deprived of the privilege of a ration allowance, wearing uniform, a travelling voucher when on leave, and other privileges enjoyed by those who are gazetted, yet nevertheless hold appointment papers, which they were asked to sign before being given their appointment and under which contract they have since served, informing them that they are subject to military law and that they are graded for pay as first-class staff lieutenants; and (2) whether there are deputy assistant censors now serving rated as civilians who hold an appointment paper making them subject to military law and grading them for pay as staff lieutenants, first class; and, if so, will such appointments be completed by the holders of such appointment papers being now gazetted?

Mr. MACPHERSON: In answer to these questions, I regret I can add nothing to the reply which I gave my hon. and gallant Friend on 30th July last.

RECORD OFFICES (PROMOTION).

General COLVIN asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether non-commissioned officers and men employed in Territorial record offices are ineligible for promotion; and, if so, whether their services will be recognised in some other manner?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Territorial Force record offices no longer exist as such, and

all soldiers serving in record offices are treated alike. In record offices there are two classes. Specially enlisted clerks, who in view of their special rate of pay are ineligible for promotion carrying increase of pay, except to fill a vacancy for deputy-superintending clerk. They draw, however, increased pay at certain intervals. There are also ordinarily enlisted soldiers of low medical categories, who are eligible for promotion to acting rank within the establishment of the office; I think, therefore, that my hon. and gallant Friend is not correct in saying that there is no eligibility for promotion.

AGGRIEVED OFFICERS.

Mr. ELLIS DAVIES asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether an officer who is asked to resign his commission has a right to have a Court of inquiry or a court-martial; and, if not, whether he has any, and, if so, what, means of re-establishing himself in the esteem and respect of his fellow officers?

Mr. MACPHERSON: An officer has no right to a Court of inquiry or a court-martial, but if he thinks himself aggrieved he possesses the right of appeal under Section 42 of the Army Act. The hon. Member doubtless realises that, of necessity, the question of an officer's efficiency is a matter of opinion, and upon the opinion of his superior officers the question of his disposal must therefore rest. On the other hand, if the disposal of an officer arises out of alleged misconduct, this is a question of fact which can properly be dealt with by a court-martial. In regard to the latter part of the hon. Member's question, I am glad to say that there are at the present moment officers serving in the Army who have re-established themselves in the esteem and respect of their fellows by regaining their commissions.

EXPEDITIONARY FORCE CANTEENS.

Major LANE-FOX asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he is aware of the dissatisfaction of all ranks of the Army in France over the prices charged by the Expeditionary Force canteens in France and their general management; whether any balance sheet has ever been published showing the

amount of their profits and the manner in which they are disposed of; and whether he will appoint a small Committee to report on the whole of their administration?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Recent reports received from General Headquarters, France, do not support the suggestion of my hon. and gallant Friend that dissatisfaction exists among all ranks in regard to prices charged by Expeditionary Force canteens and the general management. During the current year very substantial reductions in selling prices have been made. A balance sheet has not hitherto been published, but the matter is under consideration. The appointment of a Committee to report upon the administration is not considered to be necessary.

WADFORD CAMP, CHELMSFORD (FOOD).

Mr. JOWETT asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he is aware that complaints are being made concerning the quantity and quality of the food provided for soldiers at Wadford Camp, Chelmsford, Essex; if he is aware that both in regard to this camp and other camps wives and parents of soldiers who have no spare money of their own to buy food with are being heavily taxed to send parcels containing food which ought to be supplied to the soldiers as part of their ordinary rations; and if he will take steps to remove this grievance?

Mr. MACPHERSON: No, Sir; I am not aware of these complaints, but I will have inquiries made, and let my hon. Friend know the result. I understand it is the fact that parcels of food are sent to soldiers in camps by their relatives, but there is really no need for this, as the ration is ample in quantity and good in quality if properly cooked and served.

MILITARY SERVICE.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS.

Mr. KING asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that Emanuel Ribeiro, a conscientious objector, now at Lord Derby's War Hospital, Winwick, has been forcibly fed since 24th January last; whether this man is still considered not to be genuine in his

conscientious objection; and whether he may now be discharged to make room in the hospital for more urgent cases?

Mr. MACPHERSON: The answer to the first and second parts of my hon. Friend's question is in the affirmative. There is no necessity to adopt the suggestion made in the third part.

WORKSHOPS (HAVRE).

Mr. JOWETT asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he is aware of the complaints of the men in the workshop section at Le Havre, France, that they are insufficiently and badly fed; and if he will make inquiries as to the cause of these complaints, with a view to its early removal?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I am not aware of the complaints to which my hon. Friend refers, but there are many workshops at Havre, and if he will give me further particulars I will inquire of the military authorities in France.

ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY (HARNESSES).

Mr. JOWETT asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he is aware that at the beginning of the War the steelwork part of the harness for the horses of the Royal Field Artillery employed on active service was painted but is now polished and burnished; if he is aware that drivers are occupied two or three hours a day at this work of polishing and burnishing; if he is aware that convoys, in some cases comprising twelve to twenty wagons taking ammunition to guns, have, in the opinion of the men whose lives are at stake, been betrayed to enemy observers by the glittering steelwork on horses and wagons moving together in such numbers; and whether, seeing that polishing and burnishing affords no greater protection to metal against rust than painting and that the absence of glittering display makes the convoys and the guns they serve less liable to attract the attention of the enemy, he will relieve the drivers of this addition to their labours whilst on active service with the Overseas Armies?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I have no information as to the point raised by my hon. Friend, but I will inquire of the Field-Marshal Commanding in France, and let my hon. Friend know the result when I am in a position to do so.

WAR SERVICE DECORATION.

Colonel FABER asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether any recognition can be given to men who volunteered for service in 1914 and were at Gallipoli in 1915, some of them having afterwards gone on to Mesopotamia; and whether he is aware that the 29th Division who served in Gallipoli receive no recognition under the proposed new system?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I would refer the hon. and gallant Member to the announcement which appeared in the Press on 16th October. Every officer and man who has entered a theatre of war will be entitled to wear a distinctive chevron when in uniform.

MILITARY POLICE.

Mr. CHANCELLOR asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he is aware of the irritation felt by invalid soldiers at being spied upon by military police in plain clothes; whether this employment of spies is general; and whether, with a view to the soldiers' recovery and early return to the fighting ranks, he will discontinue this practice?

Mr. MACPHERSON: The answer to the first and second parts of the question is in the negative, and the third does not therefore arise.

ARMY FARRIERS.

Mr. PETO asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he has received a copy of a resolution passed at the annual meeting of the National Master Farriers' Association on 25th August last; whether the question of using the qualified shoeing smiths now serving in various branches of the Army as regimental farriers and saving the cost of training less qualified men at farriery schools has been considered; and, if so, whether any decision has been arrived at?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on the 23rd instant to my hon. Friend the Member for Central Edinburgh?

INDIAN TROOPS (AMMUNITION).

Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE asked the Secretary of State for India whether he

is aware that a new rifle, designed for Mark VII. ammunition and that will not fire Mark VI. ammunition accurately, is being issued to troops in India destined for Mesopotamia; that the Indian military authorities refuse to issue Mark VII. ammunition to these troops for practice purposes before embarkation and insist on their taking Mark VI. ammunition with them to Busra; and what happens to this useless ammunition and who is responsible for the policy?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Troops proceeding to Mesopotamia from India carry rifles which are sighted both for Mark VI. and the Mark VII., and with which either mark of ammunition can be used with a minor adjustment of the sight. The Mark VI. ammunition is not useless, and the last part of the question does not, therefore, arise.

NAVAL AND MILITARY PENSIONS AND GRANTS.

Mr. GILBERT asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office why Army Order 367/15 has been issued to Poor Law authorities; why under this Order all separation allowances are stopped to any dependants of wounded men who are placed in Poor Law infirmaries, generally by instructions of hospital authorities; and whether some London authorities have refused to supply the names of men in their infirmaries as requested by this Order?

Mr. FORSTER: The Order in question has no reference to wounded men, but regulates generally the issue of allowances from the public funds to persons in rate-supported institutions. Where the fixed Army separation allowance is stopped under its operation a discretionary allowance from the local War Pension Committee is issuable according to the circumstances of each case. I regret to say that the statement in the last part of the question is correct.

Mr. RENDALL asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether a soldier released for agricultural work receives 25s. weekly, of which at least 17s. 6d. is required for lodgings and food, that all Army pay is stopped, and that the wife and one child's allowance is reduced from 19s. 6d. to 16s.; and, if so, is the soldier expected to give his wife 3s. 6d. out of the 7s. balance in his hands, or are the wife and child to go without food?

Mr. FORSTER: The facts are not quite as stated. Twenty-five shillings is the minimum rate of wages, and Army pay is issued in addition for Sundays. The farmer, if he supplies board and lodging, charges 15s.; otherwise the charge varies according to local circumstances. If the soldier paid 17s. 6d. the balance in his hands would be at least 7s. 6d. weekly; and it has already been announced that in future the public will pay the compulsory allotment of 3s. 6d. to the wife.

Mr. ANDERSON asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether soldiers living in their own homes receive an allowance of 20s. 5d. per week on which to maintain themselves and their families and no separation allowance; and, in view of the present cost of living and the inequality of the financial treatment between those who live at home and those who are billeted out, if he proposes to take any steps to increase the family allowance?

Mr. FORSTER: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply which was given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich on the 18th instant.

Mr. BARLOW asked the Under-Secretary of State for War, with regard to the case of Mrs. Ogden, of 65, Ordsall Lane, Salford, whose son, Private James Ogden, No. 43322, York and Lancashire Regiment, joined in February, 1917, whether he is aware that she has not yet received any dependant's allowance; and whether, in view of this delay of eight months, he will have the matter inquired into at once?

Mr. FORSTER: Inquiries will be made, and I will inform my hon. Friend of the result as soon as possible.

GOVERNMENT WORKERS, SHOE-BURYNESS (WAGES).

Mr. W. THORNE asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether he is aware that the wages paid in the Government Department at Shoeburyness to the various men engaged in the building trade, including the skilled labourers and general labourers, are in some cases 2d. per hour below the district rate in South-end for a similar class of work; and if he will take action in the matter?

Mr. FORSTER: Inquiry is being made, and I will let the hon. Member know the result.

OFFICERS' BOOTS.

Captain BLAIR asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office when the issue of boots on repayment to officers on home service will be made as promised?

Mr. FORSTER: I am afraid that my hon. and gallant Friend is under some misapprehension. I know of no such promise, as he mentions, with regard to boots. Officers can always obtain boots of rank and file pattern from store on repayment.

PRISONERS OF WAR.

PAY.

Mr. BUTCHER asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether the German Government pay British prisoners of war in Germany of the rank of lieutenant 60 marks per month and no more; whether the equivalent of this sum in British currency at the present rate of exchange is about £1 14s. 3d.; whether the War Office deduct from the pay of such British prisoners of war the sum of £3 per month; and what becomes of the difference between the £3 deducted and the £1 14s. 3d., the equivalent of the sum received by the British officer?

Mr. FORSTER: The value of marks issued and spent in Germany has no connection with the foreign rate of exchange; and it is only where German money is brought to this country by released or escaped prisoners that the question of loss arises. In such cases this Department is prepared to exchange any German currency received as pay from the German Government for the equivalent in British currency, calculated at the standard rate of 20 marks to the £.

Mr. BUTCHER asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office what is the sum in German marks which by The Hague Convention of 18th October, 1907, the German Government are bound to pay British officer prisoners of war in Germany; and what is the sum in German marks which they actually do pay?

Mr. FORSTER: Under The Hague Convention Germany should pay British officers the pay of officers of corresponding

rank in the German Army. Instead of this they pay 60 marks a month to lieutenants and 100 marks a month to officers of higher rank.

REPATRIATION.

Mr. KING asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that the conference of European red cross societies held in Geneva on 19th September proposed the repatriation of all interned civilians as promptly as possible and the repatriation of all unwounded prisoners who have endured a long captivity on condition that they are not sent back to the front; and whether, in view of the allegation that the Germans hold more prisoners than the Allies, the Government is favourably considering this proposal?

Mr. J. HOPE: This suggestion has been repeatedly considered; but the military reasons which have hitherto prevented its adoption remain as cogent as ever.

TEMPORARY QUARTERMASTERS (RETIRED PAY).

Mr. BARLOW asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he will consider the advisability of bringing temporary quartermasters under the provisions of Article 577 of the Royal Warrant for Pay and Allowance for the Army?

Mr. FORSTER: The scale of retired pay in Article 577 is intended only for permanent Regular quartermasters. No temporary officer counts his time as service towards retired pay, and it is not intended to make any exception in favour of quartermasters. Further, the retired pay under Article 577, apart from disablement cases, is only granted to Regular quartermasters when they are retired for age or have given enough service to be allowed to retire voluntarily. The temporary quartermaster would never be in this position, but he has the same privileges as Regular quartermasters if he has to retire for disability.

SAILORS AND SOLDIERS (INCREASED PAY).

Sir J. D. REES asked the Pensions Minister whether the Government proposes to treat part of the recently sanc-

tioned increase in the soldiers' allowances as deferred pay to accumulate up to the date of his discharge, so that he may be relieved from anxiety and want during the interval elapsing between his discharge and his return to civil employment?

Mr. FORSTER: The answer is in the negative. Facilities are given for investing in the various War Loans, and it is hoped that full advantage will be taken of them.

DISABLED SOLDIERS (MEDICAL REFEREES).

Mr. CHARLES ROBERTS asked the Pensions Minister what arrangements have been made for the appointment of medical referees under Article 12 of the instructions and notes on the treatment and training of disabled men?

Mr. PRATT: In response to advertisements inserted in the medical Press and otherwise circulated, a number of applications for the post of medical referee have now been received from all parts of the country, and a Committee of Selection, consisting of representatives of the Central Medical War Committee, the Local Government Board and the Insurance Commission are considering the qualifications of candidates. The Committee have already made recommendations to cover all the Southern, and some of the South Midland Counties of England, and the whole of Wales, and over 100 medical referees, out of a probable total of about 400, have been appointed.

TENTERS' STRIKE (BELFAST).

Sir HERBERT RAPHAEL asked the Minister of Munitions whether the manufacture of linen for aeroplanes has been delayed by the closing for six weeks of the weaving manufactories in the North of Ireland, whereby 11,000 workers have been kept out of employment; whether the dispute between the employers and the Tenters' Union which caused the stoppage was referred by the Ministry of Labour to arbitration under the Munitions of War Acts; whether the arbitrator's award has been duly given and accepted by the men; whether the employers have, nevertheless, refused to allow the men to return to work unless they sign an undertaking to accept a lower rate of wages than that awarded

by the arbitrator, and are keeping the mills closed; and, if so, what steps he intends to take in the matter?

Mr. KELLAWAY: I shall be glad if my hon. Friend will put this question down for Tuesday next, when my right hon. Friend hopes to be prepared to make a statement.

MUNITIONS.

LIQUOR TRAFFIC (STATE CONTROL).

Sir ERNEST LAMB asked the Minister of Munitions whether he will circulate to Members of Parliament the figures recently published regarding the effect of the control of the liquor traffic in munition areas on drunkenness and excessive drinking, and on illness or mortality due to alcoholism?

Mr. KELLAWAY: An abstract of returns of convictions for drunkenness in scheduled areas of Great Britain with other statistics bearing on alcoholism has been compiled by the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) and placed on sale as a Stationery Office publication. This return has been deposited in the Library and copies can be obtained by Members on application at the Vote Office.

WORKERS (RAILWAY FACILITIES).

Mr. ELLIS DAVIES asked the President of the Board of Trade whether, in view of the fact that railway facilities have been granted to the reserve munition workers, he can now see his way to grant the same facilities to those who have, on the appeal of the Government, voluntarily removed to other districts to do work of national importance, involving, as in the case of a number of quarrymen from North Wales, a journey of close upon 200 miles to visit their families?

Mr. BECK: The Army Reserve Munition workers to whom the hon. Member refers are granted free railway travelling upon certain occasions. The quarrymen referred to are N.S.V.'s, and in order that they may visit their homes at recognised trade holidays they are allowed to purchase return railway tickets at the cost of a single fare. The Minister of National Service has now inaugurated a War Work Volunteer Scheme under which Volunteers will be granted similar travelling privileges to those enjoyed by the Army Reserve Munition Workers. The existing

National Service Volunteers will, where suitable, be invited to enrol as War Work Volunteers and will then qualify for the increased travelling facilities which the hon. Member has in mind.

CEMENT (HOLLAND).

Major CHAPPLE asked the President of the Board of Trade what amount of cement was exported from Britain to Holland during the past twelve months and what amount during the corresponding twelve months immediately preceding the War?

Mr. WARDLE: The quantity of cement of United Kingdom manufacture registered as exported from this country to the Netherlands in the twelve months ended September, 1917, was 41,300 tons as compared with 17,000 tons in the twelve months ended July, 1914.

RACE MEETINGS (RAILWAY FACILITIES).

Mr. DUNCAN MILLAR asked the President of the Board of Trade if he can state the number of race meetings held during this season in connection with which special railway facilities have been afforded; and how many special trains have been run to convey horses and passengers to such gatherings during the past year?

Mr. WARDLE: One of the conditions under which racing under Jockey Club Rules was allowed during the present season was that no special trains would be provided. The duplication of trains may have been necessary in some cases, but the Board of Trade cannot give the number of instances in which extra trains were run.

Mr. MILLAR asked whether it is intended to afford railway facilities for race meetings during the present winter; and, if so, how many special trains will be required for the conveyance of horses and passengers to the race-courses?

Mr. WARDLE: In the circumstances now existing it will not be possible to afford railway facilities for race meetings during the coming winter.

SURPLUS WAR STORES (SALE).

Major CHAPPLE asked the Minister of Reconstruction whether his attention has been called to the sale of war spoil which was re-sold at a net profit of 2,500 per cent.; and whether, in order to prevent a similar sacrifice when the War is over of the millions of pounds' worth of machinery, plant, and buildings supplied by the Government to private factories making munitions, he will set up a Committee charged with the duty of keeping a record of all such contributions of plant and material, of investigating the uses to which these could be put in the post-war enterprises of the firms concerned, and of estimating this value and taking it in shares instead of in money on behalf of a trust for the endowment of education, of scientific research for the benefit of industries, and of schemes for the betterment of workers?

Dr. ADDISON: After reference to all the Departments concerned, proposals for obtaining complete inventories of all surplus War stores and for advising as to the best way of dealing with them, as well as for the establishment of proper machinery for giving effect to the decisions arrived at, are now in an advanced stage. If the hon. Member will repeat his question in a few days' time, I hope to be able to give him further information on the subject. I have no knowledge of the particular incident referred to.

POSTAL SERVICE (WOMEN CLERKS).

Mr. FELL asked the Postmaster-General if his attention has been called to the trouble which is arising at the post offices owing to the fact that the Ministry of Munitions takes away many women clerks by offering them increased wages, so that the staffs are depleted, whilst at the same time further work is continually being thrown on the post offices, and that if this continues a breakdown will ensue in the postal service; and what he proposes to do under the circumstances?

Mr. PIKE PEASE: My right hon. Friend is not aware of the facts stated by the hon. Member. If he will send him particulars of the cases he has in mind inquiry will be made.

Land Purchase (Ireland).

Mr. PATRICK WHITE asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether he will state the total amount advanced in cash and stock, respectively, during each of the last three financial years by the Estates Commissioners; and whether he will state the quantity of untenanted land at present in their possession in County Meath, the quantity they have already distributed in the county, and the quantity, if any, that they are at present negotiating the purchase of?

Mr. DUKE: The amounts advanced by the Estates Commissioners in cash, 2½ per cent. and 3 per cent. guaranteed stock during the three financial years ended 31st March last, are:

Year ended 31st March.	Cash.	2½% Stock.	2% Stock.	Total.
	£	£	£	£
1915 ...	3,577,437	322,731	878,952	4,779,120
1916 ...	1,178,112	314,020	675,009	2,167,141
1917 ...	1,299,520	167,686	646,719	2,113,925

Prison Warders (Ireland).

Mr. P. MEEHAN asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland if he is aware that up to October, 1915, Irish prison warders were in receipt of two pairs of uniform boots, issued free of charge, yearly, in accordance with the terms of their appointment providing them with free uniform; that each of those pairs of boots were kept in proper repair by prison labour, also free of charge; that in October, 1915, the free issues, plus repairs, were withdrawn and a cash allowance of 26s. per year given in lieu; that at the present time 26s. is wholly inadequate to provide boots and keep them in proper repair for a year, and that that sum is just sufficient to merely keep the boots repaired without purchasing new ones; whether he is aware of the discontent at present prevailing amongst the Irish warders consequent on their being compelled to utilise a portion of their salary to provide themselves with what they are legally and rightly entitled to be supplied with free by virtue of the terms of their appointment; and if he will now consider the advisability of making representation to the proper quarter with a view to having those officers' boot allow-

ance substantially increased so that they may sustain no loss by being deprived of their former free issues?

Mr. DUKE: Up to the year 1915 Irish prison warders were allowed two pairs of boots per annum and repairs of same, the last issue being made on 1st April, 1915. In October, 1915, the allowance in kind was replaced by a cash allowance of 6d. per week which is the same as that granted to Scottish prison warders and to the Royal Irish constabulary. The allowance was paid as from 1st April, 1915. Owing to the high cost of footwear due to war conditions it is probable that the allowance is not now sufficient, but it must be remembered that the warders have been granted two war bonuses to meet the increased cost of living, and they have benefited by these bonuses to the extent of at least 7s. per week.

Old Age Pensions (Clerks' Fees).

Mr. BYRNE asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether he is aware that the scale of fees for remuneration of clerks to committees and sub-committees of old age pensions has remained unaltered since 1908, and that the regulations regarding additional allowances and abolishing poor relief disqualification coming into force in July last deprived the clerks of a much needed source of income, meaning in most cases a reduction of 50 per cent. off their total income; and whether, to make this loss good, the Treasury, or whoever is responsible, will increase the scale of fees payable to clerks for old age pension claims from 5s. per first twenty claims per quarter to 7s. 6d. per claim for the first twenty claims, and from 2s. 6d. per claim for every additional

claim over twenty per quarter to 5s. per claim, thus bringing the clerks' income up to what it was before July last?

Mr. BALDWIN: I am aware that the scale of fees has remained unaltered, but it is a generous one, and there appears to be no justification for increasing it. With regard to the alleged deprivation of a source of income, it must be remembered that the great bulk of the work performed by the clerks was in connection with the initiation of the original scheme, and was, therefore, of quite a temporary character.

Mail Service (County Donegal).

Mr. HUGH LAW asked the Postmaster-General if it is intended to discontinue the running of a mail car between Creeslough and Downing's Bay, county Donegal; whether this car at present is the sole means of regular communication between these places; and whether he has received representations showing that its discontinuance would involve serious dislocation in the development of the fresh fish traffic from Downings *via* Creeslough railway station?

Mr. PIKE PEASE: A mail car between Letterkenny and Downings (*via* Milford) will shortly be introduced in place of the present car between Creeslough Station and Downings. The new service will be economical and will provide improved postal facilities. Though the mail car appears to be the sole means of regular communication between Creeslough and Downing's Bay, little use is made of it for passenger and goods traffic, and I am satisfied that the new arrangements will not adversely affect the fishing industry at Downing's Bay.

ORDERS OF THE DAY.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE.

Mr. McKENNA: Can my right hon. Friend say what the business will be for next week?

Mr. BONAR LAW: On Monday the first Order will be the Motion of which notice was given by the Prime Minister yesterday. Afterwards, we hope to take the Coal Bill, the Petroleum (Production) Bill, and some other smaller measures. On Tuesday there will be the Vote of Credit, on the following day the Report of it, and on Thursday the Second Reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Mr. McKENNA: Has my right hon. Friend considered the point that the Coal Bill is not printed yet?

Mr. BONAR LAW: It will be printed to-morrow, but I can say at once that if there is a general desire that there should be a short interval before it is discussed we shall not proceed with it on Monday.

Mr. CURRIE: Are we to understand, in view of what was said yesterday, that the Petroleum (Production) Bill is not to be touched to-day? I presume so.

Mr. BONAR LAW: Oh, no; I hope my hon. Friend does not consider that what I said yesterday affects the Financial Resolution. Surely all the points it is wished to raise can be dealt with on the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. CURRIE: Can the right hon. Gentleman say when he will be ready to proceed with the Bill proper?

Mr. BONAR LAW: On Monday. I have said so.

Mr. BURDETT-COUTTS: Are we to imply from the right hon. Gentleman's statement that the Representation of the People Bill will not be taken next week?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I have not implied it. I have stated it.

Mr. KENNEDY JONES: Can the right hon. Gentleman say when he hopes to be able to introduce the new Air Ministry Bill?

Mr. BONAR LAW: As soon as the time of the House enables us to do so—probably the week after next.

Mr. W. THORNE: Why not meet to-morrow, then?

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL.

Considered in Committee.—[Progress, 24th October.]

[Mr. WHITLEY in the Chair.]

CLAUSE 18.—(*Voting by Absent Voters.*)'

(1) For the purpose of giving persons whose names are entered on the absent voters' list an opportunity of voting at a Parliamentary election, the returning officer shall, where an election is contested, as soon as practicable after the adjournment of the election, send a ballot paper to each such person at the address entered against his name on the absent voters' list in the register together with a declaration of identity in the prescribed form.

(2) The ballot paper marked by the absent voter and accompanied by the declaration of identity duly signed and authenticated shall, if it is received by the returning officer before the close of the poll, be counted by him and treated for all purposes in the same manner as a ballot paper placed in the ballot box in the ordinary manner.

(3) A person whose name is entered on the absent voters' list shall not be entitled to vote except as an absent voter in pursuance of this Section.

(4) His Majesty may by Order in Council prescribe the forms to be used for the purposes of this Section, and make Regulations as to the mode in which ballot papers are to be sent to the voter and as to the authentication of any marked ballot papers, and generally for the purposes of carrying this Section into effect and for preserving the secrecy of voting in pursuance thereof.

Amendment proposed [24th October], after Sub-section (2), insert the words—

"(3) For the purpose of allowing more time for the receipt of ballot papers from persons whose names are entered on the absent voters' list, His Majesty may by Order in Council direct that the counting of votes at any elections to which the Order applies shall, instead of taking place as soon as practicable after the close of the poll, take place at such time (not exceeding eight days after the close of the poll) as may be fixed by the Order, and returning officers shall comply with any such direction;

(4) During the continuance of the present War and a period of twelve months thereafter, the following special provisions shall apply for the purpose of enabling persons whose names are entered on the absent voters' list to appoint voting proxies in certain cases:

(a) His Majesty may by Order in Council direct that voting by proxy by persons registered as naval or military voters shall be permitted in any area on land abroad mentioned in the Order if it appears to him that ballot papers sent to that area by post cannot reasonably be returned before the votes are counted, and that the case cannot be met by an order under this Section postponing the counting of votes;

(b) A person whose name is entered on the absent voters' list, if he satisfies the registration officer—

(i.) that he is registered as a naval or military voter and is serving, or about to serve, afloat, or in any area on land abroad in which voting by proxy is permitted in pursuance of an Order in Council made under this Section; or

(ii.) that he is a merchant seaman at sea or about to go to sea;

shall be entitled, if he so desires, to appoint a proxy, and, having appointed a proxy, to vote by proxy at a Parliamentary election in accordance with and subject to the provisions of this Act;

(c) No ballot paper shall be sent for the purpose of voting by post to a person who has appointed a proxy under this provision while the appointment is in force;

(d) The provisions set out in the Third Schedule to this Act shall have effect with respect to voting by proxy:—
[*Sir George Cave.*]

Amendment proposed to the proposed Amendment, in Sub-section (4), leave out the words "During the continuance of the present War and a period of twelve months thereafter."—[*Mr. Peto.*]

Question again proposed, "That the words proposed to be left out stand part of the proposed Amendment."

Mr. PETO: It will be, perhaps, for the convenience of the Committee if I shortly recapitulate the position as we left this matter last night. There are certain points which it is just as well the Com-

mittee should bear in mind. There is no doubt that in the earlier Debates on the question of the absent voters that it was the general view of the Committee that the proposals made by Mr. Speaker's Conference did not give facilities for voting to a large enough proportion of soldiers and sailors and men of the merchant service. The proxy vote, which is the subject of this Amendment, was inserted to meet the general view of the Committee, and was added in order to give facilities for voting to those so far away that no other species of vote would be effective. In between the proposal of Mr. Speaker's Conference that the vote by post should be received during the period between the nomination and the polling and this proxy vote for those who are furthest away, comes Sub-section (3) of Clause 18, which we debated yesterday, based upon the proposal of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for North St. Pancras (Mr. Dickinson), that the counting of the votes should be left open, if it was found desirable, in order to get a larger number of those votes by post recorded. That proposal has now been limited, by what we decided last night, to the period of the War and twelve months afterwards. As the Government Amendment stood, it proposed a complete scheme, graduated to meet the case of men of varying degrees of remoteness, and claimed to give as many people as possible who desired it the chance of giving the personal vote, leaving the proxy vote only as the resource of those who were so far away that even the extension of hours of counting votes would not apply. This intermediate proposal is limited to the period of the War and twelve months afterwards. The question before the Committee is whether this scheme of proxy voting, which represents certainly the consensus of the opinion of the Committee at an earlier stage, should also be limited to the duration of the War and twelve months afterwards. The Home Secretary yesterday agreed that, so far as the merchant service was concerned, there was no logical reason for that limitation. These men have been asking for practical facilities to give their votes for many years, seeing that the conditions of their employment will not alter materially whether the country is at war or peace. Most of us contend that practically equally there is no reason to withdraw the proxy facilities from the Army and Navy twelve months after the declaration of peace.

That is the present position. I only want to add a word or two with regard to the pitfalls as to this proxy form of voting which were pointed out in the Debate yesterday. As to the quality of proxy voting, the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Cleveland (Mr. H. Samuel) put it very low indeed. He put it so low that he said it only amounted to the nominating of an additional plural voter. I cannot agree with that description, and I do not believe it would have been put forward if the right hon. Gentleman had seriously considered the provisions of Clauses 5 and 18 as they are and will be, and the Third Schedule, which we have yet to consider, which provides the rules for this proxy voting. Surely it means, if you take such a low view of the value and security of the proxy vote as that, that in every case the proxy nominated is likely to be untrue to his trust, and that he will vote as he personally likes and not as the absent elector directs he shall vote. When we bear in mind that the nomination of a proxy under the rules is primarily to be given to the wife and that the Home Secretary has an Amendment down to include the parents, or brother, or sister of the absent voter, I do not think it can be contended seriously that what it amounts to is nominating an additional plural voter. I admit frankly that the proxy vote is not as good as the personal vote, and that every facility should be given to exercise the personal vote where that vote is possible. The Committee, however, has come to the conclusion that so large a proportion of these absent voters will not by any machinery be able to register their personal vote, that the proxy vote is essential. This is a crucial question as to whether the proxy vote should be a purely temporary provision, only for the period of the War and twelve months afterward, or whether, once having given these votes to the merchant seamen and to our soldiers and sailors, we should not at any rate leave it to the future to decide if and under what circumstances they ever should be withdrawn.

The Third Schedule has yet 4.0 P.M. to be dealt with. The rules are fairly drastic, particularly the first, fifth, and ninth. It is provided in the first of the rules that Regulations are to be made or authorised under the Act. The fifth one provides that the wife of an elector may be nominated, and I should like to see that rule strengthened, as that only in the event

of an absent elector having neither wife, parent, brother, nor sister should he be allowed to nominate any other elector whatever. That provision alone, or the omission of permission to nominate any elector except a close personal relation, would entirely get over what I think was the strongest argument against the proxy vote as used yesterday, that it might be merely under the machinery of election, a method of enabling an election agent, or a man's union official, to collect a vast quantity of unfilled-up proxy forms and fill them up at his own sweet will. If that sort of thing is not prohibited by the Regulations to be made under the Act by the Government, it can be perfectly easily prohibited by a stiffening or strengthening of these rules which we have have still to discuss.

I should now like to make a suggestion to the Home Secretary. We had a very considerable Debate on this subject yesterday. It was quite clear that a very large number of Members were strongly of opinion that these voting facilities, which are entirely in addition to anything which was proposed by the Speaker's Conference, and which are inserted in the Bill as representing the opinion of the great majority of the House, should be withdrawn. I took upon myself to speak at eleven o'clock last night in order that the Committee might have an opportunity of considering this question during the interval and perhaps arriving at some better conclusion that a division against the Government. I hope the Home Secretary will not think it necessary to pursue that course. This proposal emanates from the House. It does not really emanate from the Government. It certainly did not emanate from the Speaker's Conference. I want to ask the Home Secretary, if the matter is dropped now after the Debate we have had, whether he will give the House a free and unfettered opportunity of voting on the question without any influence of the Government or the Government Whips. Every Member of the House and the public outside will now have had an opportunity of considering this question. Knowing that it is still undesided, no one will be able to say it was not the considered decision of the House as a whole, whichever decision is arrived at, and I very much hope the Home Secretary will be able to agree to that suggestion, which seems to me so much better than the one which was put out last night making these provisions

[Mr. Peto.] permanent with regard to one section of the population, namely, the merchant service only, and temporary as regards our soldiers and sailors.

The **SECRETARY of STATE for the HOME DEPARTMENT (Sir G. Cave)**: I am much obliged to my hon. Friend for the way in which he has dealt with the matter. The point, of course, is in one sense a short one. We are all agreed that there should be voting by proxy to some extent and in certain cases. The point between us is, shall that be a provision for the War only, or shall it become part of the permanent law of the land. We may do a good many things for the War only, but when one is proposing a change in the permanent law of the land one has to be very careful. Apart from personal opinion, about which I do not want to say a word, I think hon. Members who are absent from the House depend upon me not to allow a proposal to be sprung upon the House without their having notice that it is going to be debated and decided and having an opportunity of attending the Debate. For that reason I was and am reluctant either to have the matter decided now or to leave it for the open decision of the Committee. Therefore, I rather welcome the suggestion of my hon. Friend that there should be a further opportunity of debating the matter. Of course, if the Amendment is dropped now it can be moved again on Report, and by that time everyone will be able to know that the question is coming on for definite decision, and will be able to attend the Debate. I think that would be the right course to take. With regard to leaving the matter open for the free decision of the Committee, it is true that this is not the proposal of the Conference at all. It is something added to the proposal of the Conference by the general consent of the House. I think I should not be doing wrongly if I said that when the matter comes up we will leave it for the House to decide. I hope that suggestion is not an unfair one. We are not pressing our own opinion at all, but we are leaving a matter which concerns the House as a whole to the decision of the House.

Colonel SANDERS: I am extremely obliged to my right hon. Friend for accepting the proposal of my hon. Friend (Mr. Peto), and, as far as I can see, it is entirely satisfactory. I do not want

anything better than that the House should pronounce a free opinion upon this subject.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: I am very glad the Amendment is not to be proceeded with now, and that the Clause will appear in the Bill in the form in which the Government moved it. With regard to what the right hon. Gentleman said in response to the hon. Member (Mr. Peto), we are all anxious to secure that the Bill should pass with a minimum of controversy and with the greatest measure of common assent in all its stages and in all its Clauses. It was understood that that would best be achieved by adhering as strictly as possible to the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference and by departing from them only when there was general assent. Two exceptions were made, one with respect to proportional representation and the other with respect to the alternative vote. Of course, that understanding, that we should depart from the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference only when there was general assent, applies not only to proposals to deduct from the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference, but also to proposals to add to them. Not a word was said in those recommendations with regard to proxy voting. It was considered, but put aside. They did not think it was a desirable measure. The proposal was then made as a plan to apply only during the War and for twelve months after as the one method for dealing with the vote of the soldier abroad. That proposition was debated at great length. There was the strongest opposition to it from many quarters, and there was a general agreement at the close of the discussion that the postal vote should be regarded as the chief means for securing the vote of the soldier and the sailor and the merchant seaman as well, and that the proxy vote should be introduced for the period of the War only as a means of securing the vote of those who are in the theatres of war too distant to enable them to vote by post. There was general assent upon that.

Colonel SANDERS: What does the right hon. Gentleman mean by "general assent"? The expression is used a great deal too often when it is not in the least true.

Mr. SAMUEL: "General assent" means that as a matter of compromise the various sections of the House who look at some of these questions from different points of view agree on a general scheme. Every Parliamentarian understands, and no one better than the hon. and gallant Gentleman, with his very long and intimate acquaintance with this House, the proper interpretation to put upon the expression "general assent." There is no general assent if any large organised body of the House definitely declares that it does not agree.

Sir G. YOUNGER: Surely the right hon. Gentleman will remember that the Clause was withdrawn. We should have gone on if we had not all differed in opinion about the matter.

Mr. SAMUEL: Precisely. It was because of that that the Clause proposed by the Government, the Proxy Voting Clause pure and simple, was withdrawn, and in response to my right hon. Friend (Sir J. Simon) and myself the Home Secretary undertook on that occasion to bring up a Clause which is precisely in the form in which it now stands on the Paper. To that there was general assent.

Sir G. YOUNGER: Not to this Clause as it stands. We had never seen it.

Mr. SAMUEL: It represented what was then under discussion. No one then suggested that proxy voting should be made a permanent system. It was never suggested for a moment. Then the Home Secretary, quite correctly interpreting the feeling of the House, brings up the Clause in the form in which it appears on the Paper, whereupon some Members moved that proxy voting should be made a permanent system. Many of us protest against that, believing it to be a thoroughly bad form of voting, and considering that it should only be adopted in the extreme case of the distant soldiers and sailors in this War, and declaring that a scheme, in any case, which has never been tried, so far as I know, in the whole history of the world and is not being tried now in any country by any Legislature, should not form part of our permanent statutory arrangements without some practical experience on our part. We say, "Let us try it and see how it works." If it works well, it can be continued even by a single line in the Ex-

piring Laws Continuance Act. If it works badly, it will be a matter of extreme difficulty to eliminate it from our Statutes, because it will need a special Bill, and goodness knows whether any Government will be able to find time to deal with a matter which would in all probability be one of controversy. Therefore, we suggest that the Clause should be left as it now stands, and I trust on further consideration the Home Secretary will find when he comes to the Report stage that in view of the strong feeling which exists in many quarters of the House with regard to this suggestion that it should be a permanent measure he will probably come to the conclusion that he would not be strictly conforming, as I am sure he desires to do, to the understanding on which the whole procedure on the Bill has been based, that we should adhere to the Speaker's Conference, except where there is a consensus of opinion that it should be departed from, and that the Government should use its influence to secure that that arrangement is carried into effect.

Mr. STEWART: The right hon. Gentleman speaks of "general assent." I am sure that the Committee will give general assent to this proposition, that the British seaman's life should not entail his disfranchisement for ever. I only rise to say how grateful I am to the Home Secretary, not only for what he has done to-day, but for what he did last night, and to assure him that we value his concession very much indeed. I would ask the Home Secretary to consider the advisability of treating the vote for seamen, whether naval seamen or merchant seamen, in a separate Clause or maybe in a separate small Bill. I think that might be advisable as a means of treating this difficult matter. I am sure the sympathy of the right hon. Gentleman is with us. It is only a question of how it can best be done.

Mr. BUTCHER: I am anxious that the right to the vote which we have given to our soldiers and sailors should be made effective and I thank the right hon. Gentleman most cordially for his acceptance of the suggestion of my hon. Friend. It appears to be most reasonable, that it should be done. No question of principle is involved. It is only a question of machinery for giving effect to the desire which we all hold. I was surprised to hear the right hon. Member for Cleveland (Mr. H. Samuel) expressing what I can only characterise as a complete distrust of

[Mr. Butcher.]
the vote of Members of this House. He appears to think that a decision which was not arrived at so far as I know, or if it was arrived at at all, was arrived at in some way at the Speaker's Conference, is a more valuable guide for the legislation of this country than the free and open vote of those who are the elected representatives of the people in this House. If that is the latest expression of democratic opinion I can only hope that democratic opinion, as expressed on that Front Bench may not go any further in such a direction. I am glad to think that when the time comes for deciding this question that particular form of democratic subtlety, if we are to call it democratic opinion at all, will find very little support from the Members of this House, and that we shall all be able to act freely and vote without coercion. I am glad to know that we shall not have coercion from the Home Secretary, who is so entirely favourable to us, as to the way in which we should give our vote.

Mr. P. A. HARRIS: I entirely agree with the sentiment just expressed in favour of things being left to the opinion of the House, but I would not confine it to one thing but to everything. The hon. Member (Mr. Butcher) wants the question to be left to the freedom of the House when it suits him.

Mr. BUTCHER: No. What I said was that where no question of principle is concerned— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, oh!"] Do right hon. and hon. Gentlemen suggest that that is not what I said? I said where no question of principle is concerned, where there is a common basis laid down by the Speaker's Conference, and where no principle laid down by the Speaker's Conference is infringed, and it is only a matter of machinery for carrying out the general view of the Speaker's Conference, it should be left to the House.

Mr. HARRIS: The hon. Member seems to think there is no principle involved. I say there is a very vital principle involved in proxy voting. I am entirely in favour of soldiers and sailors, whether the latter are in the mercantile marine or in the Navy, having votes not only during the War but in peace time, and I do not think it is impossible to devise a scheme for that purpose. I do not call giving a proxy giving a vote. The whole purpose of a vote is that it should be secret and

by ballot, so that no one knows which way a man is voting, and no pressure should be exercised. The proxy is liable to all kinds of abuse, and it gives tremendous power to political organisation and party machinery, for which there may be a large amount of money available, to exercise influence over the proxy. We all agree that as a war measure we should allow proxy voting to a very limited extent. We know that in the special circumstances of the War there are a great number of men on active service in regard to whom it is impossible to make arrangements for voting except by proxy, but in normal times it is possible to devise machinery by which soldiers and sailors shall not be deprived of their vote. I think it will be nothing short of a scandal that in times of peace the men who voluntarily joined the Army and are prepared to give their lives should be in a worse position than the ordinary civilians. It is the business of this House to do what has been done in Australia and Canada and make arrangements either for the soldiers having direct representation through their own Member in this House—I do not think that is an impossible proposition—or alternatively to send special ballot boxes out to far countries, so that the men may exercise their votes. That was done in the case of Canada on two occasions, and also in the recent Australian elections. Ballot boxes came over and the soldiers exercised their voting, not by proxy influenced by political machinery, but as free citizens on the spot by ballot. That is the reason why some of us strongly object to this makeshift proposal. It is not giving votes to soldiers; it is depriving soldiers of votes. It is giving them only the right to exercise their vote by proxy. It is a very significant thing that some hon. Members who are most loud in their advocacy of this complex scheme were the very men who were opposed to this Bill in principle, and against the extension of the principle of the franchise. They are opposed to the abolition of plural voting, and do not believe that every citizen is equally entitled to a vote.

Sir G. YOUNGER: Will the hon. Member say who are those hon. Members to whom he refers?

Mr. HARRIS: They are those hon. Members who voted against the Second Reading of the Bill as a whole, and who opposed it also in their speeches. It is an

insult to the sailors to say that they are only going to have proxies. They ought to have votes. The miners have their own representatives, and various trade organisations have their own representatives, and it is not an unreasonable proposal that after the War we should try to provide some means whereby these men, especially sailors in the mercantile marine, should have direct representation. I object to proxy voting being adopted as a permanent thing. This Bill is not the last word in electoral reform; it is largely a war measure to meet the special circumstances of the War, and that being so, I think it would be unfortunate to put forward a proposal of this kind as a permanent thing, because it puts soldiers and sailors and men of the mercantile marine in a worse position than ordinary citizens.

Colonel Sir HAMAR GREENWOOD: With reference to the arguments of my hon. Friend (Mr. Harris), I am glad to know that he and all of us are agreed that the naval and military men and the merchant seamen should have votes in the Clause under discussion. My hon. Friend referred to the Colonial system of voting. It must be remembered that the Committee has accepted the proxy system as the best system, having regard to the far distant areas in which these particular men are located, and to the enormous number of them—a number much larger than the voters of the Dominions and the Colonies put together during the War. I congratulate the Home Secretary on his decision. He has left the matter to the decision of the House, and is going to give the House two or three weeks more opportunity of considering it. I thank him sincerely for doing that. I protest against the idea that the freedom of Members of this House should be restricted.

Mr. LIEF JONES: Will the hon. Member support universal suffrage?

Sir H. GREENWOOD: If the right hon. Gentleman will bring in an Amendment for universal suffrage, I will support it.

The CHAIRMAN: The controversy is going very wide from the question before the Committee. I think we might dispose of this Amendment now.

Sir H. GREENWOOD: When a Privy Councillor interrupts a private Member, I think it is the private Member's duty to uphold the dignity and rights of the

majority of Members of this House. I sincerely hope that some arrangement will be come to in regard to this Amendment, so that the House will be unanimous on the Report stage. I am convinced that none of us wants to deny to soldiers, sailors, and merchant seamen the opportunity of voting. I think the proxy system is the best. We do not wish to deny the right of voting to these men on whose sacrifice the whole Empire has been built up and by whose courage alone it can be maintained, and I hope that on the Report stage we shall be unanimous in regard to the means of carrying that out.

Mr. JONES: I apologise to the hon. and gallant Member for my interruption. I thought it was a relevant interruption. This Bill is a compromise. It really does not represent the hon. Member's view, or my view, or the view of any hon. Member. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Does any hon. Member doubt that? In many parts the Bill is a compromise arrived at in order to avoid controversy during the War, and we have reached something like a franchise Bill which can be passed by general consent. We cannot press our own particular view in regard to so complicated a compromise without putting an end to that unity which we desire. I think seriously that proxy voting should be tested in actual operation, and that we should be able to test it by general consent, and that it would be very unwise for those who support the proposal to make proxy voting permanent to press their view at the cost of dividing the House.

Mr. PETO: I beg leave to withdraw the Amendment standing in my name.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Sir G. YOUNGER: Does the Home Secretary intend to proceed with the remaining part of the Clause, or will he leave it to be dealt with on Report stage?

Sir G. CAVE: No; I hope the Committee will proceed with it.

Colonel LESLIE WILSON: I beg to move, in paragraph (a), to leave out the words, "His Majesty may by Order in Council direct that."

My object in moving this Amendment is to retain to this House the right of legislating on this most important point as to which soldiers and which sailors shall vote by proxy and which shall vote by post. The Home Secretary said yester-

[Colonel L. Wilson.]

day that we could see which were the areas from which it is possible to receive a postal vote and which were the areas in which it would be necessary to have proxy voting, in order to secure that the soldiers and sailors should register their votes. I submit that all regulations and details in connection with this voting should be submitted to and approved of by this House, and not be settled by Orders in Council issued by some Government Department. If we let this Clause pass as it stands at present there will be no hon. Members in this House who will have the faintest idea as to which soldiers are going to vote by post and which by proxy. I think that it is this Committee which should lay down these Rules and Regulations.

Colonel HOPE: I think this is a very important Amendment. I do not quite understand the alteration in the new Amendment put before the Committee by the Home Secretary from day to day. We all know that it is in response to the objections raised by the right hon. Member for Cleveland on the 15th of August. He objects to a free and unrestricted proxy vote for soldiers. The original Amendment laid down that those who registered as naval and military voters should be entitled to vote by proxy, if they so desired. That is simple and straightforward and is, I think, what the soldier requires and desires and is entitled to receive. The right hon. Member for Cleveland, who always professes to have a great desire to give votes to soldiers, but is very ready to raise criticisms and difficulties when proposals are put forward, has stated—and it has also been stated by an hon. Member opposite this afternoon—that the proxy is not a satisfactory vote for a soldier or a merchant sailor. I think that it would be a mistake to insist that merchant seamen and soldiers should have the proxy vote and nothing else. What this House should give them is, if possible, the personal vote. Failing that, let them have the right of the postal vote on the absent voters' list; but if, owing to their service to their country, they are in such a quarter of the world or are so situated that they cannot possibly exercise the vote by either of these undoubtedly preferable means, then it should be their undeniable right to have the proxy vote and to be allowed to appoint a proxy.

This new Amendment of the Home Secretary leaves all details to Orders in Council. That depends entirely upon who may happen to be the permanent officials and may be in charge of the Government Departments concerned. But it is most difficult to place territorial limits on where this proxy vote can be exercised. If they have a choice as to whether to exercise the proxy vote or the postal vote, that is a short and simple way; but who is going to decide where a proxy vote is going to be exercised? If not exercised in the North of France, is it to be exercised in the South of France or in Gibraltar? Where are you going to draw the line? It is a most difficult question altogether for the soldier under this new proposal. He will have to give considerable notice where he is going to be quartered. He cannot say that. He may be ordered off at a few moments' notice to Gibraltar or Salonika, or anywhere. Why not let him have the right of appointing a proxy, if he wishes to do so, if he prefers a proxy vote where he is doubtful about the possibility of being able to exercise either the personal or the postal vote? That was the original proposal of the Home Secretary. Unfortunately he has altered it owing to pressure put upon him by the right hon. Member for Cleveland. I regret myself in many ways that we had not a clear Division to-day on the previous question as to whether this proxy was to be continuous or not, because it would have shown clearly those who wish to give soldiers unrestricted, free, and generous franchise, and those who wish to curtail it as much as possible. I hope that the Home Secretary will consider this Amendment favourably, and, if possible, adopt the Clause as proposed by him on the 15th August.

Sir G. YOUNGER: I support this Amendment strongly. I regret that the Clause which we had on the Paper as late as Monday last has never been moved, and that the Clause now under discussion has been put forward. The right hon. Gentleman opposite says that there is general assent in this matter. General assent means that the Home Secretary and he are in agreement. The right hon. Gentleman does not like proxy voting. But if the House gives the right to vote by proxy it ought not to hedge it round with impossible conditions. The former Clause was perfectly simple and effective

and one that everybody could understand. It made it quite possible for a man to get a proxy paper and to vote by proxy. Now we have a Clause which imposes on this man, who may be ordered at forty-eight hours' notice to go abroad, conditions which he cannot possibly fulfil. We have only got to read the two Clauses and contrast them to see this. Why are these difficulties introduced? Are they really not intended to make this privilege ineffective? To my mind they are. These conditions are so difficult for the ordinary soldier, that they will have the effect of denying the right, which I hope the House will in the end give him. Take this particular Amendment dealing with the Order in Council, which is to be published, and which is to state in what parts of the world a man may exercise a proxy vote, and with what proxy he must vote. How is he to know? He is told in Clause 1 that he has got to prove that he is registered as a naval or military voter, and that he is about to serve in an area abroad in which voting by proxy is permitted. How is he to know? He may not even be told where he is going when he gets his orders to go abroad for service. Suppose he is told to go to Salonika, and when he gets there he is ordered to Egypt. If he is able to say, "I am going to Salonika," he may get his proxy paper. I do not suppose that they will invalidate it if he goes to Egypt. But soldiers are shifted about so much in time of war, and even in time of peace, that very often he cannot say where he is going. He has got to find the registration officer. He has got to prove that he is remaining in some place or other. Every sort of difficulty is put in his way just at a time when, owing to the short notice which he has got, he is probably attending to family arrangements. He has not got time to think about these things. The whole of this Section wants modification. We want a restoration of the *status quo ante*. We want something like a Clause which soldiers and sailors can understand, which can be made effective use of, which will give the privilege of exercising the vote that is intended, and not hedge it around with impossible conditions.

THE PRESIDENT of the LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD (Mr. Hayes Fisher): I am quite sure that neither of my hon. Friends have studied the Amendment which would cut at the root of the whole scheme that is contemplated, and that is agreed to by those who have very strong

views indeed against any proxy system. There are places obviously so distant that you could not possibly be expected to be able to have the votes from these places counted unless we consented to an almost impossible extension of the vote. The scheme underlying this Amendment amounts to this, that where soldiers and sailors who are serving at such a distance that they can, by the extension of the date of polling, be expected to send in ballot papers in time to be counted, they shall give their votes not by proxy, but in person by voting. That is the general scheme of this Amendment. Somebody asks me "Why?" That is answered by this, that after long debate in this House and after endeavouring to ascertain as far as we could what was the opinion of the House among all sections, we found that there was an undoubted desire expressed that as far as possible the system of voting in person and not by a substitute vote should be maintained. I have been a great advocate of the proxy system of voting, where the soldier cannot give his vote in reasonable time by post, but I think undoubtedly that all will agree that it is far better, from every possible point of view, that men should give their votes in person or by post rather than by proxy. The scheme in short is this, that where a soldier or a person can, by the extension of time allowed by this Amendment—that is, in the additional eight days allowed after the poll closes for the ordinary voter—send in his ballot paper in time to be counted, the soldier or sailor shall vote by post and not by proxy. But that if it appears that there is no reasonable chance that he will be able to return his ballot paper in sufficient time to have it counted within the extra eight days which are allowed for that purpose before the poll is declared, then that he shall be allowed to vote by proxy.

That is the scheme of this Amendment. Obviously somebody must say whether a particular voter will be able probably to use his vote by post within the extra period of eight days. Who is that person to be? We had a Debate on this very subject. It was proposed in some quarters that the House of Commons itself should say. I pointed out at the time that it would be quite impossible for the House of Commons to decide in particular circumstances and particular conditions as to whether a man in a particular regiment was at such a distance from the centre where the vote was to be given that he

[Mr. Hayes Fisher.]

could not be expected to return his ballot paper in time. Obviously the House of Commons could not decide that. If the House of Commons could not decide it, who is to decide it? It must be some Department of State acting by Orders in Council. It must rest upon the Government of the day. There is an utter fallacy in what was said by the hon. Member for East Edinburgh. The Government carries on all the time. There are some Ministers there who carry on the Government of the day. There are Departments left which will be able to see that the Order in Council is carried out. There will be some Department and Minister, probably, charged with this very duty of saying whether or not a particular person is so far away from the scene of the polling that he will not be able to exercise his vote, even when the eight days are allowed, and in that case the decision will be that he will have the opportunity of voting by proxy. I hope the decision will be given long before the polling takes place, and possibly even before the election is known to be going to take place. There is usually some brief intimation that an election is to take place and a poll to be held within a certain time, and when it becomes common knowledge of the House and of the Department that an election will occur, obviously some Department under this Order in Council will exercise its powers to decide as to whether or not certain soldiers are so far removed from the scene of action, so far as polling is concerned, that they will be allowed to exercise their vote under the proxy system. I am not going to say that this is not full of difficulties. I think it is full of difficulty, and I think the whole scheme is full of difficulty. But whatever system you devise, when you are dealing with three or four million of voters, some of them at sea, some at Salonika, some in Mesopotamia, some in East Africa, some in India, and some we do not know where—it may be in Germany at the time—it cannot but be full of difficulty. What we have to arrive at is a system by which we can meet the general wish that soldiers and sailors shall not only be registered and have the vote, but shall have an opportunity of exercising it. I think the scheme of the Home Secretary does meet the wishes of the House. To-day he has made considerable concessions to hon. Members, and they will be able to vote on the Report stage with full notice, in a full House. As

to the Amendment at present before the Committee, I think it is one which we cannot accept.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: The hon. and gallant Member for Midlothian (Colonel Hope) just now struck a controversial note which I was very sorry to hear, and accused Members of this House as being anxious to curtail in every possible way the facilities of the soldier and sailor to vote at an election. I think that was a very unjustifiable remark. I know no Member of this House who has had any such object in view or who has taken any such action.

Colonel HOPE: Then why not leave the vote to the House?

Mr. SAMUEL: The issue between us is that the hon. and gallant Gentleman and those who think with him and favour the Clause as it originally stood, confining the soldier and sailor to the proxy vote, favour what we regard as taking away from the soldier and sailor the postal vote.

Colonel L. WILSON: That was the Clause.

Mr. SAMUEL: It is not the Clause now.

Colonel WILSON: The Clause read that any such person "if he so desires."

Mr. SAMUEL: There was no arrangement such as we have now to enable the time to be extended so that he may exercise the postal vote. We say that the soldier and sailor ought himself to vote for the candidate that he prefers, and that it is the business of the Government and of this House to take steps to enable him to do so. The hon. and gallant Member and his Friends say that the business of the House is to require the soldier to entrust his interests to some other person to act for him as may seem well to them. That is the real division between us. With respect to the particular Amendment before the Committee, the Clause of the Home Secretary suggests that it should be left to an Order in Council to say within what areas the proxy vote should apply—that is to say, in which the postal vote cannot apply. The plan of the Amendment now before the Committee is that this House should now draw a geographical line between the areas in which these two systems of voting should operate. I should be very glad if it were possible. I should like

to see it laid down definitely that the bulk of our Armies in France and Flanders, and, as we may then hope to be the case, in Germany, should have the right of voting by post; but it is exceedingly difficult to determine at what particular parallel of latitude or longitude we can say that there will be time for the soldier to receive and to send back his postal ballot paper, and beyond what degrees it may not be possible.

Colonel WILSON: Will not exactly the same difficulty occur to whoever settles the terms of this Order in Council?

Mr. SAMUEL: They will have the time and the evidence before them that will enable them to go into the question of detail that will necessarily arise, and to say who shall vote in one way and who shall vote in another. Further, there is the question of the Fleet and merchant service to be decided. Those ships in home ports or close at hand will, one may hope, be able to exercise the postal vote personally, and those more distant ones will have to exercise the proxy vote. Therefore, it will be necessary to delegate this task to the careful and detailed consideration of the Government of the day before the time arrives, and I should like to ask the Home Secretary to give the House at least this assurance, namely, that every effort will be made that practical considerations allow to extend the postal vote as widely as possible. I should like to receive from him an assurance that it is his hope that the main bulk of our Army which we may anticipate will be in north-western Europe, shall be conceded the opportunity of voting personally and not be required to entrust their interests to proxies at home.

Sir G. CAVE: The military and post office authorities assure me that it is impossible to tell beforehand exactly what period will be required to enable the Army in France to vote. It depends in what part of France or Flanders the Army is, what are the facilities for taking and bringing back letters at the moment, and what is going on at the front at the particular moment. Although I have had many conferences with the Adjutant General and with the Secretary of the Post Office, as well as with the Naval authorities, on this point, they assure me that they are satisfied that they could not fairly give the assurance for which the right hon. Gentleman asks. That is also

the answer to my hon. Friends who support this Amendment. We must judge at the time. We cannot do so before the day, and it is far better to leave it to someone who will know the facts then.

Mr. SAMUEL: I am sorry to intervene again, but will the Government take steps to advise the whole of the Army in France and Flanders to appoint proxies beforehand, or is it suggested that proxies should be appointed at the last moment? I hope the right hon. Gentleman will give an assurance that every effort will be made that is practicable to enable the bulk of the soldiers to vote by post because I am sure the House and country would be most dissatisfied if after all the trouble that has been taken to devise this scheme the Government were to come forward and say that they cannot arrange for the postal vote and must ask the Army to vote by proxy.

Sir G. CAVE: My Amendment indicates that. Of course, an Order in Council would be made first under this Clause, and that would extend the time for the election. Then we should know the extent of the time allowed for counting, and the authorities would be asked whether the Army in a particular part of the world could vote within that time. It is only if they say that it cannot reasonably be expected to vote within that time that we can make the proxy Order. The right hon. Gentleman will see in paragraph (a) of Sub-section (4) of my proposed Amendment that it is only if it appears to the authority that ballot papers sent to that area by post cannot reasonably be returned before the votes are counted that a proxy order can be made. It will, therefore, be their duty to treat, as the first way, voting by post, and only if it is impossible to vote by post will the proxy order be made.

Mr. SAMUEL: I think the Committee would very much prefer to extend the period of eight days to a longer period if the Home Secretary is advised that eight days would not be sufficient to enable the bulk of our forces in France to vote by post.

Sir G. CAVE: It is impossible to say that. My belief and hope is that it will.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: At what stage after the passing of this Bill will facilities be given to our soldiers and sailors to appoint their proxies?

The **CHAIRMAN**: Really that does not arise here. Let us dispose of the present Amendment.

Colonel **WILSON**: How is a soldier who is serving abroad to satisfy the registration officer?

Sir **G. CAVE**: By writing a letter.

The **CHAIRMAN**: That does not arise here. Do let us keep to one Amendment at a time.

Amendment negatived.

Colonel **SANDERS**: I beg to move, in Sub-section (4), paragraph (a), of the Home Secretary's proposed Amendment, after the word "permitted ["shall be permitted"], to insert the words "afoat or."

These are the same words as occur in paragraph (b) (i) of this Sub-section, and their intention is, of course, to include the sailors as well as the soldiers. As I read paragraph (a) as it stands, the sailor does not come in at all. I am sure that is not the intention of the right hon. Gentleman, and I hope he will either accept this Amendment, which will make it clear that the sailor does come in—and by the sailor I mean the man in the Royal Navy—or, if he does not think that is the best way of doing it he will put in some words which will make it quite clear that this applies to the Royal Navy as well as to the Army.

Sir **G. CAVE**: I do not quite like these words, because if they are put in here it means that the Order will authorise proxy voting everywhere, and will make no distinction whatever. I think our intention is that even as regards the sea there shall be some definition as to place.

Mr. **HOLT**: Could not we leave out the words, "on land"?

Colonel **SANDERS**: Can you talk about the sea as an area?

Sir **G. CAVE**: It is rather a large area.

Mr. **R. McNEILL**: We are brought very close to the difficulty that has been already pointed out, namely, that a man cannot say, especially at sea, where he will be at the time of the election. The Home Secretary says that the Order in Council is to state the area of the sea which shall be brought within the scope of the provision as to proxy voting, but how is it conceivably possible that any

given voter will be able to say beforehand whether or not he will

5.0 P.M. be within that particular area.

A man may be in Liverpool the day before the election, or a week before, and may be on the way to Valparaiso before the election takes place. Unless a man knows with some certainty where he will be, it appears to me futile to propose that an Order in Council shall fix the area.

Sir **G. CAVE**: On reflection, I think the Amendment probably is right. I see it exactly follows the wording in line 21. I therefore accept the Amendment.

Amendment to proposed Amendment agreed to.

Colonel **SANDERS**: I beg to move, in Sub-section (4), (b), (ii.) of the proposed Amendment, to leave out the words "at sea or about to go to sea," and to insert instead thereof the words "or fisherman, and that there is a likelihood that he will be at sea at the time of a Parliamentary election."

The object of this Amendment is to make it clear that "merchant seaman" should include fishermen, and also to make clear the words "at sea or about to go to sea." "About to go to sea" seems such a very vague expression. These Orders in Council as to proxies must, in order to be effective, in many cases take place some weeks ahead, and a man might go to sea and come back again two or three times in a week. I would suggest to the Home Secretary that the words I have ventured to put down, "and that there is a likelihood that he will be at sea at the time of a Parliamentary election," really express better what he means and what I mean myself.

Mr. **HOLT**: This Amendment raises several questions. I should like to ask the Home Secretary whether it would not be better to deal with the question of fishermen by a definition Clause. I think most of us know what we mean by the term "merchant seaman," but I am not quite sure how far everybody does. I should like to ask the Home Secretary whether he is quite sure that the master of a ship is a merchant seaman, or whether anybody can be a merchant seaman unless he has actually signed articles for the voyage. This is rather a technical point, but it is very important we should get these matters quite clear. I would suggest it would be better to deal with that

question and with the question of fishermen by means of a definition Clause, or an Amendment on the Report stage to the definition Clause, so as to make it quite clear what a merchant seaman is. Then I should like to point out to the Home Secretary that, as his Amendment now stands, any merchant seaman who is at sea, or about to go to sea, can claim the right to vote by proxy. Now there are a great many people engaged in coastal trade, on cross-channel boats, and in tugs, who are undoubtedly merchant seamen, who could perfectly well vote by the postal vote, and whom nobody desires to vote by proxy. I submit that some words should be inserted indicating that only merchant seamen going long distances should vote by proxy. The words I would suggest would be after "at sea or about to go to sea," to add "on a voyage of such a character as to make it improbable that he will be able to vote otherwise than by proxy." The House does not desire, I am sure, that people should vote by proxy who could vote by the postal vote or in person. I think the Committee ought also to bear in mind that merchant seamen are in some respects in a very different position from soldiers and sailors, and we should very likely find in practice, if merchant seamen were allowed to vote freely by proxy, that they would find it very difficult to get employment on board ship unless they had handed their proxies to the officials of their trade union. I think we should make certain that no merchant seaman should vote by proxy unless he cannot vote by postal vote or in person.

Mr. DUNDAS WHITE: I am sure the Committee appreciate the object which the hon. and gallant Member (Colonel Sanders) has in moving his Amendment. The words "and that there is likelihood he will be at sea at the time of a Parliamentary election" I submit ought certainly to be inserted. On the question of fishermen, I entirely agree that they should be included, but I would rather seek to make sure of it by endorsing the proposal made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham that a definition Clause for this purpose should be included in the Report stage. So far as I know, the principal, and possibly the only, definition of seaman at present is in Section 742 of the Merchant Shipping Act. There it says "Seaman includes every person except masters, pilots or apprentices duly indentured and registered, employed or

engaged in any capacity on board ship," and "ship" in turn includes "every description of vessel used in navigation not propelled by oars." If we were to take that definition as it stands it would include fishermen, but unfortunately it would exclude masters and pilots. In these circumstances we could hardly take that definition. I would suggest that the word "seamen" ought to be defined for the purpose of this Act, making it quite clear that it includes both fishermen and masters and pilots. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman the Home Secretary would agree to insert a suitable definition Clause on the Report stage, and would at the present stage accept the remainder of the Amendment proposed by my hon. and gallant Friend (Colonel Sanders).

Mr. DICKINSON: This discussion, I think, shows again the great difficulty of any question of proxy voting. I hope the Home Secretary will consider very carefully what arrangements he is going to make with regard to fishermen. One very important point is, when is the proxy going to be given. I understand the proposal probably means that anybody who thinks he is going to sea should be entitled to send to the registration officer and say, "I am an absent voter, but instead of voting by post I want to vote by proxy." When is that to be done? This is very important. The register is made up and the absent voters' list is made up, but the list of proxy voters is not made up, and if at the last moment before an election it is possible for a man to say "I want to appoint so-and-so as a proxy," no one will know it. A person will come to vote on behalf of John Smith, and there will be no means of checking him. It seems to me to be absolutely essential that if you are going to have a proxy vote you must have a list of proxies. You are bound to. You will have a list of absent voters who are going to be entitled to send in their votes by post. That is a reasonable arrangement, but if you are going to enable someone else to give a vote for them you are bound to have a list of the names of the people who are going to vote for them.

Sir G. CAVE: Why?

Mr. DICKINSON: It seems to be absolutely essential, to prevent personation, that the person who comes to record the vote should be known. The proxy is not known. Personation agents can say to a man now, "Are you John Smith?" and if the agent on one side or the other

[Mr. Dickinson.]

thinks that that is not John Smith he can challenge him. That is possible. But now it is not a question of John Smith, but of someone absolutely unknown — Maria Robinson, or Mary Smith, or someone else not on the list—who comes and says, "I am the proxy for So-and-so." Surely, in order to protect ourselves against abuses, we must have a list of the persons who are to be entitled to come to the voting booth and say, "I am the person authorised by this man to vote." It appears to me that that is so, with great respect to the Home Secretary. Perhaps I am out of order in discussing all these points, but I think the question of proxies a very difficult question, and we have got to be particularly careful about it. It seems to me that this proposal, so far as I can make it out, means that the absent voter is to be entitled to give a proxy paper to someone else, and that the registration authority will have this given to them at the last moment. I think it would be opening out a great difficulty in the administration of the Ballot Act.

Sir G. CAVE: I think really we should not discuss now the question just opened by the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Dickinson). It seems to me not to arise on this Amendment, but any suggestion he may have to make on that point I shall be prepared to deal with on the Schedule. With regard to the Amendment, I am prepared to accept the latter part. As to the definition of "seaman," I think the view taken is that anybody who is engaged under the Merchant Shipping Act is probably a merchant seaman, but I agree that the definition which has been quoted shows that a master is not a merchant seaman for the purposes of that Act, although he might be for the purposes of another Act. With regard to the point mentioned by the hon. Member for Hexham, if a union said to a man, "Unless you leave your proxy with us certain consequences will ensue," that would be a very grave offence.

Mr. HOLT: Would the Home Secretary not agree to insert words now, limiting the right to exercise the proxy by seamen to those seamen who can use the postal vote? As I pointed out, there are a large number of seamen who are never very far from port — on cross-channel tugs, between Holyhead and Dublin, and on the boats between Newcastle and London. Are all these people to vote by proxy?

Sir G. CAVE: They would have to show that they would probably be at sea when an election comes on.

Mr. HOLT: A man may be at sea, but only for the day of the poll.

Colonel GRETTON: The objection I have to this Amendment is the great difficulty in regard to the "likelihood" of a man being at sea. In regard to the whole of this discussion, on the question of proxies, I do not see how the matter can be settled unless the House determines whether it is going to have proxies or not. The subject has always been contested on one plea or another. Here we have another of these compromises proposed by my hon. and gallant Friend, a compromise which the Home Secretary is ready to entertain. If a man wants a proxy he will have to satisfy the registration officer that there is a likelihood of his being at sea, otherwise he would not be able to obtain it. The ordinary seaman does not know whether he will be at sea or not, but he has to make his choice as to whether he is going to have a proxy or not at some time during the period of the election. It is quite clear that a man accustomed to going to sea has every right to a proxy. The right hon. Member for St. Pancras has shown that this compromise is quite impossible, and the Committee are coming to a point at which they must really make a decision as to whether there are to be proxy voters or not. If there is to be a provision with regard to proxies it must be effective. If the House is against proxy voting, then the whole of this matter would disappear, and a very large number of electors would be deprived of that right to vote which they could exercise if proxies were allowed.

Mr. M. HEALY: I did not quite gather on which side of the subject the hon. and gallant Gentleman was speaking. At one time I thought he was going to enter into a furious denunciation of proxy voting, but the end of his speech rather suggested that was not so.

Colonel GRETTON: The hon. Gentleman is quite mistaken in the impression he has gathered from my observations, for I am a very strong supporter of proxy voting, without which there would be a large number of voters deprived of the opportunity of voting.

Mr. HEALY: I thank the hon and gallant Gentleman for his information, but surely if there is to be proxy voting we ought to consider the circumstances in which proxy votes are to be taken, and that is what hon. Members are doing in discussing this Amendment. This is an entirely new proposal which is being made. Ever since there has been voting in England it has been the rule that a voter shall vote in public, and in presence of the candidate. That has been the law of England ever since Parliament has existed. At one time the voter, in order to record his vote, had to come to the county town. In the largest county there was only one voting place, and every voter had to come in person, if he desired to record his vote, no matter what the circumstances. To appoint a person who is to represent the voter as proxy voter is a great change. Leaving out the question of whether or not a fisherman is to get the vote, the Amendment of the Home Secretary now before the Committee proposes that the merchant seaman is to get the vote if he has satisfied the registration officer that he is a merchant seaman at sea or about to go to sea. Obviously if he is a merchant seaman the only way he can satisfy the registration officer is by correspondence. The Clause provides that he has to satisfy the registration officer that he is a merchant seaman at sea or about to go to sea, and I take it that the term, "merchant seaman," includes a seaman who goes on an ordinary coasting vessel, and who might go on a voyage from London to Glasgow or from England to Ireland. The point, however, of the proposed Clause of the Home Secretary is that there is no time fixed for satisfying the registration as to the proxy. That is not provided for, and accordingly there is no limit under the Bill. It is perfectly plain that the seaman may set about his task of satisfying the registration officer at any moment of time between the completion of the register and the day of election. If that be correct, it would mean that the seaman, the day after the register was completed, could go to the registration officer and say, "I am about to go to sea, and I want to poll by proxy." The registration officer would reply, "Oh, yes; where are you going?" "I am crossing from England to Ireland," and the registration officer might say, "Yes, but you will be back in a

week"; in which case it would be open to the voter to say, "That is no business of yours; I am a merchant seaman about to go to sea, and I am anxious to get a proxy."

It appears to me that the Amendment of the hon. Member to the Home Secretary's Amendment is an improvement of the Clause, and if adopted the seamen would then not only have to satisfy the registration officer that he was a merchant seaman, but he would have also to satisfy him that there was a likelihood of his being absent at the time of the Parliamentary election. But the objection to the whole thing is its extraordinary vagueness. There is no procedure proposed. We do not know whether the registration officer has to hold a Court, where he can administer the oath, or how the application is to be made—whether made personally or whether the seaman may send somebody else to make it for him. I should have thought that in embarking for the first time on this very great change in the law, that Parliament would be very cautious in making this great change, and, at any rate, would have fixed with some exactness the conditions under which this great power is to be granted. This all raises the question as to when, and where, and how, the proxy himself is to satisfy the registration officer. That is left absolutely at large. Then there is another point—what is to happen at the polling? You have satisfied the registration officer that there is to be a proxy, but at the polling place the candidates are represented, and I suppose some power will be given for making inquiry in regard to the person who comes up and says, "I am the proxy for so and so." Surely there should be some power to make inquiry, and that is undoubtedly a point on which the law would have to be further amended. The presiding officer might be called upon by the agent or the candidate to question the person who comes to vote, and I have no doubt that could be done. But the Parliamentary agents on both sides, apparently, are to walk into the polling place utterly ignorant and unprepared beforehand, and not knowing what number of voters are voting as proxies, nor who the persons are. The agent has no power whatever to investigate the matter. We are proceeding with the utmost rashness in the matter of the election of a Commons House of Parliament. I hope before another stage is reached that the

[Mr. M. Healy.]

Government will take into consultation some expert on election matters and try and avoid the pitfalls which otherwise undoubtedly lie under the feet of everybody concerned in Parliamentary elections if matters are allowed to stand as they are at present. There ought to be a time limit fixed for proxies, and there ought to be a list of persons appointed to exercise the power of proxy votes, and on the face of the register some indication as to who are the persons given that power. I think the Amendment is an improvement on the words of the Clause, and as a mere matter of technique of drafting it is an improvement.

Mr. PETO: I feel convinced that anyone who is going on a short voyage would be quite certain to adopt the alternative of the more direct method of voting given under the first two Sub-sections of this Clause and not by proxy. I agree with the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Holt) that the basis of the absent voters' list proposed by the Speaker's Conference was that the voter should show there was reasonable cause to suppose that owing to his business he would be absent from the place of polling on polling day, and that was the reason he was to be admitted to the list. Arguing from that, I think it is a sound contention that the absent voter who wishes to be given the right of voting by proxy should equally show that the probability is that he will be at sea, or the nature of his voyage is such that he is not likely to be able to vote by post and therefore wishes to exercise the inferior method of voting by proxy. I think the Government might very well accept either these words or similar words rather than the vague assertion that he is at sea or about to go to sea. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for St. Pancras (Mr. Dickinson) said that we must have a list of proxy voters. I am not going to pursue that matter now, as it is obviously one which arises on the Schedule, and I imagine some arrangement of that kind would be contemplated by the Regulations. I always supposed when the registration officer had made out the absent voters list and had any application for proxies that that would be noted on that list, and I believe that is the scheme on which the Government are proceeding in this matter. I think some words should be adopted to show before a man is given a proxy vote that there is at least reasonable probability

from the nature of the voyage he is going to undertake or his employment that he cannot use the better facility of the ordinary absent voter.

Amendment to the proposed Amendment agreed to.

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That the words, as amended, be there inserted."

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: I wish to put a question to the Home Secretary as to the Order in Council. The Home Secretary said, in reply to his predecessor, that it was impossible now to define the area in which proxy votes would be used. He said that the naval and military authorities, who had to be consulted, must be guided by the circumstances of the time as to which voters could be reached by post and which voters must be allowed to vote by proxy. I think that explanation is very serious in connection with the terms of the Amendment, because the Amendment provides that not until an Order in Council is made can any arrangements be made for proxy voters, so that until then a soldier or a sailor will not know whether he has the option of voting by proxy or not. An Order in Council will not, according to what the Home Secretary said, be made until the last moment and not until the military and naval authorities can say, having regard to the position at the time, what soldiers can be reached by post and what soldiers cannot be so reached. If the Order in Council is not made until the military position enables you to say reasonably where a man cannot be reached by post, how will it be possible, after the Order in Council is made, for a soldier or a sailor in those distant parts to apply to the registration officer in his constituency at home to appoint a proxy in the way prescribed? It is clear from this Amendment that it is not until the Order in Council is issued that a soldier or a sailor can appoint a proxy. I submit that the Amendment as drawn requires the most drastic revision in this connection. If the Order in Council is not going to be issued, as the Home Secretary said, until the naval and military position enables them to define the areas where proxy voting is to be permitted, then the whole scheme will fall to the ground on the question of machinery, because it will not be possible for a soldier or a sailor to make the necessary application in time to the registration officer for the division. I think this is a point of

substance. It has been hinted at in the course of discussion on several of the Amendments to the Home Secretary's proposed Amendment. I should like to know how this difficulty, for I think it is a real difficulty, is going to be dealt with and whether any modification is going to be made in the Amendment as now drafted?

Sir WILLIAM COLLINS: I should like to support the request which has just been made by the hon. Member. I listened very carefully to the Debate, and it seems to me, if the proxy vote is to be a reality and not to be liable to a considerable amount of abuse, that the Committee is entitled at this stage, before adopting the Amendment, to have a little information from the representatives of the Government as to the procedure contemplated under this Clause. I understand there will be the option to the Executive of the day or the Government Department concerned to prolong the period within which the votes must be counted up to a limit of eight days. If they exercise that option there will then arise the question of whether a further Order in Council should be made in order to entitle the absent voter to vote by proxy or by post. Surely it is a very relevant consideration to ascertain at what date it is contemplated that it will be the duty of the absent voter to claim, if he so desires, the right to vote by proxy, and whether it is intended that a list of proxies is to be exposed by the election officer in due course as a precaution against personation. I think we are entitled to know whether it is intended to be the period when an election is immediately anticipated or whether it is open to the absent voter to claim that he shall be registered to vote by proxy at any time after the register is made. I submit we ought to have some information from the President of the Local Government Board on this matter before we proceed to pass this Amendment of the Home Secretary.

Mr. HAYES FISHER: I should be most sorry if I were unable to satisfy, even to a certain extent, those hon. Members who have asked what is, after all, a very important and practical question. When this Bill becomes an Act of Parliament, as it will before many months or weeks have elapsed, it is quite evident when any election takes place the Department of State concerned will have to consider the making of two Orders in Council. The one Order in Council will be required for regulating the action by which the count-

ing of votes is postponed for eight days after the ordinary closing of the poll for the ordinary elector. The Department will also have to consider the making of another Order in Council by which it shall be established that there are certain geographical areas in which soldiers or sailors are employed, or likely to be employed, which are so remote that even when the first Order in Council is applied, and an additional eight days is allowed for the counting of the votes, the soldiers and sailors will not be able to make their vote effective because the postal arrangements cannot be made so complete or so efficient that the ballot papers will be returned in time for those ballot papers to be counted. My hon. Friend wishes to know when the second Order in Council is going to be made, because if you leave it until the actual time of the election, or close up to that time, it may be that you will preclude a great number of sailors or soldiers from applying for a proxy order in time for them to obtain it, so as to give an effective vote by proxy; and you will at the same time have excluded them, because they are at such a distance from the locality of the election, from giving a vote either ordinary or by post. This is what will happen.

When this Bill becomes an Act, and when we know what Minister will be entrusted with the issue of these Orders in Council and the fulfilment of the desire of the House that the Orders in Council shall be made, I think the Minister will surely be able to say at once, "There are certain geographical areas which obviously are so distant from England, Scotland or Ireland—as the case may be—that sailors or soldiers in those areas will not be able to avail themselves of the facilities for voting by post, even though the eight days have been allowed: they will be at such a distance that the eight days alone will not enable them to give their vote by proxy. Any Minister, therefore, having discretion as to what geographical areas he shall bring within his Order in Council need not wait at all for the election. After this Bill is passed he may at once say that the Order in Council shall apply, say, to East Africa, to India, to Mesopotamia, possibly to Egypt, possibly to Salonika. There will be other places, such as France and Flanders, where undoubtedly he will say: "I really could not possibly make an Order in Council at the present moment, but I have every hope, and every ground

[Mr. Hayes Fisher.]

for hope, that the possibilities and the facilities will be such that I will be able to carry out what is the general desire of the House, that every soldier who can give a vote by post shall give that vote by post; therefore, I must use my discretion, and keep that discretion handy until the election is close upon us, and until I really know where the soldiers are, what facilities there are so far as the railways and the Post Office are concerned before I say whether or not the soldiers in any part of France shall have this proxy."

I do not think I can do more at present to satisfy my hon. Friend by any answer. That is how the matter strikes me. If the Order in Council were left to the discretion of my hon. Friend opposite he would say: "There are certain geographical areas where it is quite obvious there is nothing like reasonable facilities—apart from any great invention, or great change in our method of transport which will annihilate the distance—by which the men can give their vote by post." As regards other areas it must depend to a large extent as to where the soldiers are, under what conditions they are, and what the post offices are, not only here, but in France or Germany, can do for us at that particular time. I think it would be quite right to say that there are a certain number of soldiers and sailors who possibly may fall between two stools. I have always thought so. As I have already said in more than one speech, whatever facilities you try to give, the whole position is so extraordinarily difficult that all you can possibly hope for is that you will give facilities, as suggested, to the great majority of the soldiers and sailors that are now serving, and will be serving, at the time in His Majesty's Forces. That is all, I think, we can hope for. What my hon. Friend anticipates is that in some of these cases the Order in Council, which will enable the men to vote by proxy, and not by post, will go too late to enable them to fulfil all the conditions under which the proxy can be obtained. Quite frankly, I would say that I think that will be so in some cases. It ought to be the object of whoever puts in operation these Orders in Council to fulfil the general desire of the House so far as he possibly can, so that everyone who cannot, by reason of distance from the scene of action, otherwise do so, shall have the power to vote by proxy, and so to get over the difficulty as well as he can. When he

has done all that I cannot help thinking that my hon. Friend is probably right. There will be a good many men who will fall between two stools, and who will be deprived of their vote because they will not have sufficient notice of the fact that they have a right to vote by proxy to enable them to exercise that vote. So far as I may have anything to do at the time by enforcing the Order in Council I shall certainly endeavour to see that the wishes of the House are carried out, and arrange an adequate time, so that as few people as possible shall, as I say, fall between two stools, nor be deprived of the exercise of that vote which I am quite sure the House desires that they should exercise.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: I am much obliged for the explanation given by the right hon. Gentleman to the points which were raised. Does he, however, not think that some addition to the machinery of election is required to meet the case of soldiers in the areas that he acknowledges he cannot say now will be entitled to a proxy vote, and who may be entitled to the proxy vote? As regards the whole of the troops in France and Flanders, the right hon. Gentleman cannot say now whether they will be in the area entitling them to a proxy vote or not. In his own words, not until near the election will the Government or the authorities be able to decide whether certain areas shall be entitled to vote by proxy or not. Is it not obvious that if you do not decide until close upon the election, that in respect to great masses of men in these areas who will be entitled to vote by proxy, that there will not be time for those men to apply to the registration officer in their own constituency at home for a proxy paper, and so to comply with all the details set forth in the Act? Is not some addition to the machinery of election required both to facilitate and to simplify the voting by proxy? There was a second point that the right hon. Gentleman did not really touch in his very lucid and frank explanation. I refer to *b* (2), "that he is a merchant seaman at sea, or about to go to sea." When an Order in Council has been made close to the election, how can that merchant seaman at sea, knowing that he can only vote by proxy, communicate with the registration officer at home and apply for a proxy paper with a view to complying with all the formalities?

Sir G. CAVE: That is struck out.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: The Clause relating to seamen at sea has surely not been struck out?

Sir G. CAVE: "At sea" has been struck out.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: The alteration made in Committee does not affect the point of my argument, which is that a man at sea entitled to a proxy vote will not have time after the Order in Council has been made to avail himself of it. Does it not mean that the whole proviso will in practice be unworkable? I want very much to ask the Home Secretary, in view of the previous explanation he made, whether he thinks that this Clause will really be workable as and when applied to the areas which are not defined until the election is upon us?

Colonel YATE: I am sorry to say that the explanation just given by the President of the Local Government Board does not in any way meet the case. It is most unsatisfactory. He has acknowledged that there will be a hiatus, and that some men may fall between two stools. All he can say with regard to that is that he hopes something will be done, and that if he is in power at the time he will do his best to see that something is done. That is not what we require. We must have the thing put definitely in the Bill at the present time, so that men do not fall out. It is the business of the right hon. Gentleman to propose something by which this mischance shall be avoided. I do ask the Home Secretary at once to give us a proposal to enable the men to vote either by one means or another. The explanation of the right hon. Gentleman, as I said before, is entirely unsatisfactory. The whole thing is left in a most unsatisfactory condition. We cannot leave the matter with the expression of a pious hope. Something definite should be done, and put in the Bill now.

Amendment to the proposed Amendment agreed to.

Further Amendments to the proposed Amendment made:

In Sub-section (4), after the word "which" ["in which ballot papers"], insert the words "proxy papers may be issued and cancelled, and in which."

After the word "voter" ["sent to the voter"], insert the words "for the purpose of voting by post."—[*Sir G. Cave.*]

Proposed words, as amended, there inserted.

Clause, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

NEW THIRD SCHEDULE.—PROVISIONS AS TO VOTING BY PROXY.

1. A proxy must be appointed by means of a proxy paper issued to the elector or to some person on behalf of the elector by the registration officer of the constituency in which the elector is registered, on an application made or authorised by the elector in accordance with regulations under this Act.

2. After a proxy paper for any constituency has been issued to an elector or to some person on behalf of the elector in accordance with this Act, that elector shall, unless the proxy paper is cancelled in accordance with this Act,—

(a) be entitled to vote by proxy in that constituency; and

(b) be prohibited from voting otherwise than by proxy in that constituency;

until the time for which the proxy paper is in force has expired.

3. It shall be the duty of the registration officer, on the application for a proxy paper, to issue a proxy paper to the applicant, or to some person on his behalf, if he is satisfied that the applicant is registered on the parliamentary register of electors for the constituency in respect of which the application is made, and is, at the time of the application, entitled to appoint a proxy.

4. A proxy paper shall remain in force only so long as the parliamentary register of electors which is in force at the time the proxy paper is issued, remains in force.

5. A person shall not be appointed as proxy under this Act, unless the person appointed is the wife of the elector or is registered as a parliamentary elector for the constituency in which the proxy paper is to be used.

6. An elector shall not appoint more than one person as proxy to vote on his behalf in the same constituency.

7. A person shall not vote as proxy on behalf of more than two absent voters at an election in any constituency.

8. The Ballot Act, 1872, and any other Act regulating the holding of parliamentary elections, including any provisions

imposing penalties in connection with voting at those elections, shall apply to persons voting as proxies in pursuance of this Act as they apply to voters, however described in those Acts, with such modifications as may be made by regulations under this Act for the purpose of adapting the provisions of these Acts to voting by proxy; and any provisions of those Acts imposing penalties for offences in connection with ballot papers or the official mark on a ballot paper may be applied by those regulations to proxy papers and any official mark on a proxy paper.

9. If any person—

- (a) to whom or on whose behalf a proxy paper for any constituency has been issued under this Act, himself votes or attempts to vote at any Parliamentary election in that constituency otherwise than by means of the proxy paper, while the proxy paper is in force; or
- (b) votes or attempts to vote as proxy on behalf of more than two absent voters at an election in any constituency; or
- (c) votes or attempts to vote at any election under the authority of a proxy paper when he knows or has reasonable grounds for supposing that the proxy paper has been cancelled, or that the elector to whom or on whose behalf the proxy paper has been issued is dead or no longer entitled to vote at that election;

that person shall be guilty of a corrupt practice other than personation within the meaning of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act, 1883, and the expression "corrupt practice" shall be construed accordingly: Provided that the Court before whom a person is convicted under this Section may, if they think it just in the special circumstances of the case, mitigate or entirely remit any incapacity imposed by Section six of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act, 1883.

10. A ballot paper shall not be delivered to a person who claims to vote as proxy for the purpose of so voting unless he produces the proxy paper to the presiding officer at the polling station, and such questions may be asked of any person at a Parliamentary election who claims to vote as proxy for any elector (in addition to those already authorised to be asked) as may be prescribed by Regulations made under this Act.

11. Stamp duty shall not be chargeable on any proxy paper under this Act.

12. A proxy paper may be cancelled by an elector by giving notice to the registration officer in the prescribed form.

13. A notice cancelling a proxy paper shall not take effect as respects any election unless it is received by the registration officer on or before the day of the election.

Brought up, and read the first time.

Sir G. CAVE: I beg to move, "That the Schedule be read a second time."

Colonel SANDERS: Will the Home Secretary give us an explanation as to what would be the proceeding in regard to this proxy voting? What is not clear to me is, what amount of application on the part of the man who wants a proxy is necessary? Will it be enough for his wife, without any written authorisation or anything of that sort, to say, "I want a proxy for my husband"? Or will it be enough for the election agent to say, "I want a proxy for John Smith, who is serving in Mesopotamia, and whose wife is living in this constituency"? It would be a convenience to the Committee if the Home Secretary could give us an explanation of what the proceeding will be as soon as the Order in Council comes into force.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: Will the Home Secretary, at the same time, answer another question as to the meaning of this Schedule? Am I right in understanding, in view of the discussion we have had, that it will not be possible for anyone to make application for a proxy paper, or to obtain it, until the Order in Council has been made defining the areas in which the soldiers and sailors may vote by proxy? Another question is, when the proxy has been issued, will a list of the proxy holders be prepared and made public? Shall we be able to consult a list and find that Mr. Smith is entitled to vote for Private So-and-so? It seems to me that such a list should be prepared and should be available. If there is any misuse of the Act it has to be checked. But I look in vain for anything in the Schedule dealing with that point. There seems to me to arise the very great difficulty with regard to the preparation of the list of proxy holders: that there may not be time, in view of the Order in Council being made near to an election, and I should like to ask the Home Secretary how that difficulty is going to be met?

Sir G. CAVE: Nobody will be able to apply for a proxy, as matters now stand, unless either he is a merchant seaman who comes within the Sub-section applying to merchant seamen—that is, he is likely to be at sea when the election takes place—or a naval or military voter within a proxy area. Therefore, in the case of the naval and military voter, the registration officer could not issue the proxy paper until after the Order in Council was made. With regard to the point put by my hon. and gallant Friend, of course the officer to whom application was made would satisfy himself that he had authority to issue it. I do not think he would issue it to anybody.

Colonel SANDERS: That was my whole difficulty, as to what would constitute the authority. Supposing there is an Order in Council that Mesopotamia will vote by proxy, has the political agent, or whoever applies, to write out to Mesopotamia and get a letter back from the elector before he is able to apply for the proxy? If not, what authorisation, or what would be sufficient, to satisfy the registration officer? If he has to write out, it might be a matter of two months.

Sir G. CAVE: If the wife of a man whom he knew to be a soldier applied to the registration officer for a proxy, I do not suppose he would trouble much further. If a total stranger, I think he would want some evidence.

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN: I cannot help thinking that these details are of such consequence to the working of the scheme that they require a little more consideration than has been given to them up to the present. I am not at all certain that I am wholly in sympathy with the opinion generally held by those with whom I have been in the past most accustomed to act. I share the universal desire of the House that when the State becomes the Army, so to speak, the soldier should be able to record his vote. I am not quite certain that I should have been in favour of any system of this kind in respect of a professional Army of the kind which existed before the War with the conditions of service which were then in force; but, granted that the circumstances of to-day make it absolutely necessary that we should provide for voting by proxy, it surely does require some further consideration before we sanction—as is suggested by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary might be the

case under the present Schedule—the issue of a proxy to a person who has not been authorised to ask for it, or receive it, or exercise it, by the person on whose behalf application is made.

Sir G. CAVE: I did not mean that a proxy might be issued to such a person, but a proxy form.

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN: I beg pardon. I had entirely misunderstood my right hon. Friend, and, of course, his explanation makes it unnecessary for me to pursue the matter. But does it not carry you back to the difficulty which other hon. Gentlemen have raised, namely, how is this application to be made and granted in time for the voter to express his view? If the form cannot be issued until the election is upon us, how is the soldier in Mesopotamia, for instance, to receive the proxy, fill it up and return it in time for his vote to be recorded?

Sir G. CAVE: It can be issued the moment the register is made up.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: The point which the right hon. Gentleman has just made with regard to the issue of proxy papers is, if I may say so, not met by the Home Secretary's reply that it is only a form that will be issued and not the proxy itself, because the words "proxy paper" are used throughout the Schedule, so that some change in the words is required to distinguish between a proxy paper, which the Home Secretary said is simply a form of application, and the proxy paper which, according to this Schedule, is the authorisation to vote.

Sir F. BANBURY: I think that must be so. I am very glad of the explanation of my right hon. Friend. I was afraid that if a man's wife went to the registration officer, the registration officer would probably consider that sufficient and give the woman a proxy paper, but I understand that is not so. If it is merely a form on which an application shall be filled up to obtain the necessary power to vote, then the words must be altered. [Hon. MEMBERS: "No!"] I think it must be so.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: I quite agree with the right hon. Gentleman the Member for West Birmingham (Mr. Chamberlain) that if we adopt the principle of the proxy vote at all in the Bill, we ought to make it in every detail as workmanlike and expeditious in its operation as we possibly can. According to the first paragraph in this

[Mr. H. Samuel.]

Schedule, there are two processes. First of all, an application has to be made either by the elector himself or by someone authorised by him. The right hon. Gentleman suggested that if a woman comes into the registration office and says, "I am the wife of So-and-so," a form of application might be issued to her.

Sir G. CAVE: If she said, "I am the wife of So-and-so, and he has authorised me to apply for the paper." It may be the Regulation would require authority in writing.

Mr. SAMUEL: That was the point to which I was leading up. The person who applies must be authorised by the elector. Take the case of a man in Mesopotamia now serving. The register is completed, his name appears on it, and an Order in Council says that Mesopotamia is an area in which men serving may vote by proxy. What is the process? The election agent for the constituency has, first of all, to secure an authorisation from the soldier to apply for a proxy form; he has to write out to Mesopotamia and say, "You have to obtain an application from the registration officer or authorise me to do so." The soldier in Mesopotamia has to write back authorising his wife or somebody else to apply for the proxy paper, and only then can the proxy paper be issued. Having been issued, it has apparently to go back to the soldier in Mesopotamia for him to sign, and then it has to be sent back from Mesopotamia. So that there are four journeys to and fro before the proxy becomes operative, and the proxy cannot be valid for more than six months, because a new register comes into force. That seems a very clumsy method of doing things, and I would suggest to the Home Secretary whether the application form could not be issued quite freely to the agent or anyone else who can show *prima facie* ground for believing that the elector is a person in an area where the proxy system is operative. There could be no harm in it, and there would be only one journey to and fro, instead of the two journeys which are apparently contemplated by the machinery as we have it on the Paper.

Colonel L. WILSON: As the right hon. Gentleman for Cleveland (Mr. H. Samuel) has clearly pointed out, this is a very serious difficulty, and will undoubtedly disfranchise a very large number of

sailors and soldiers in distant parts of the world. Would it not be possible for proxy papers to be sent out, under recognised authority, to all sailors and soldiers in distant parts of the world which are scheduled by the Order in Council as being areas in which the proxy vote will be essential? If those papers are sent out under direction of the Army Council or the Admiralty through the authorities there, they could then be distributed to the men, and filled up by them and sent direct back to the authorities at home. I think that is a suggestion which the Home Secretary might seriously consider, otherwise a large number of our troops will be disfranchised.

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN: I think after what we have just heard the Home Secretary will agree that I was right in pointing out that the process under the Bill is not quite as simple as he thought it was. Under the Bill we have to have two proxies, and you first appoint a proxy in order to enable you to appoint another. It is an extraordinarily complicated process which takes a great deal of time, and surely it is contrary to the interests of everyone concerned and the public interest to introduce agents when you can go straight to the principal. Why should the election agents be set to work at the beginning or any part of an election to search where they can get proxies from? I hope the right hon. Gentleman will consider whether the suggestion made by the hon. and gallant Member opposite can be carried out and put into a practical form. It seems very much better that the proxy should be sent out by the official authority direct to the sailor and the soldier, and they should be allowed to address them to anyone they please. I think that would be more likely to get the true feelings of the soldiers and sailors.

Mr. SAMUEL: I think the suggestion which has just been made is the more preferable so far as it can be adopted. There will doubtless be some in respect of whom it will be necessary to devise other means and to provide an alternative.

Mr. DILLON: I hope the Home Secretary will not accept the suggestion made by the hon. and gallant Member in the form in which he made it. What he suggested was that the proxy forms should be sent out to the commanding officer and that he should distribute them among the men. I strongly object to any such pro-

posal as that, and this only illustrates one of the difficulties of the whole system. It would be a most improper thing to allow the commanding officers to distribute these proxy forms to the men, and I think they ought to be sent straight to the men themselves.

Colonel WILSON: That is really my intention. I want the forms sent directly to the men.

Mr. DILLON: Then I misunderstood the hon. and gallant Gentleman. I do not think officers should have any voice in making suggestions to the men about filling up the form. A simple plan seems to me would be that the moment the register is made up every sailor or soldier serving abroad who is entitled to vote by proxy should receive an official communication from the registration officer enclosing the proxy form and explaining what the rights of the soldier are and how to fill the form up and what he is entitled to do. I think that ought to be done the moment the register is made up. Afterwards the soldier can fill the form up or hold it until such time as he thinks proper to fill it up. It must be manifest to everybody that this proxy system is open to the gravest possible abuse. Supposing a soldier serving abroad at a great distance from his home, gets a proxy form and fills it up and the election does not take place for three or four months after he gets his form. In that case how are you going to secure that he will give his vote in accordance with his own opinion? In times like these no man, even if he lives at home, can forecast exactly how to give his vote at an election which is going to take place in three months' time, and the difficulty must be far greater when the voter is abroad.

It may be some self-satisfaction and glory to the soldier to have a vote, but it really is not a vote at all in the ordinary sense, because a vote given in the dark without any intelligent idea of what you are voting about is not a real vote and is only a pretence. I do not see how you are going to devise any plan which will get rid of this fundamental objection and enable men who are living abroad really to vote properly. I know the feeling of the House is very strong on this point, but I cannot help saying that in my opinion there is a great deal of nonsense talked upon this subject. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] Is there a more

deserving body of men in the world at present than the Civil servants of India? They are an intelligent, educated body of men living abroad, men who at all events as regards the junior branch of the Civil Service of India take a keen interest in home politics. Have they ever claimed a proxy vote, or if they had done so would it have been considered? Take the men administering affairs in the Soudan—

The CHAIRMAN: I must point out to the hon. Member that we have already passed a Clause which establishes the proxy vote, and that this Schedule only deals with the regulations whereby it can be carried out. As far as this stage is concerned we must take it that the principle of the proxy vote has been settled.

Mr. DILLON: Of course I took the principle as having been settled. I was only illustrating that the system is essentially fundamentally and artificially unsound, and that you cannot get rid of all the difficulties. It is impossible to devise any system that will get rid of all the difficulties. The suggestion is that the soldier should receive his proxy form without asking for it, and with it a full and clear memorandum of what his rights are and how he has to fill the form up so that he will not have to go to any officer to assist him. He should be allowed to fill it up at once or keep it as long as he likes.

Mr. GILBERT: I want to ask the Home Secretary if it is proposed to publish a list of the proxy votes. It seems to me that to carry out these rules effectively from the local point of view it is very desirable that a list of the proxy voters should be published. It will be necessary from the organisation point of view of the party agents that you should have a list of the people to whom proxy votes have been issued. No rule is provided for the publishing of such a list by the registration officer. If a rule is brought in which makes it compulsory for the registration officer to publish such a list, then you must have a time limit beyond which proxy papers cannot be issued, because it will be quite impossible for the registration officer to publish a list of proxy forms if you are going to allow them to be issued within two or three days of the election. It does seem to me that if the system of issuing proxy papers is to be carried out effectively you must have a list of the proxy voters, and if you have a printed list you

[Mr. Gilbert.]

must have a time limit beyond which the registration officer cannot issue any proxy forms.

Sir G. YOUNGER: I wish the hon. Member for East Mayo (Mr. Dillon) had taken a more active part in these discussions because he is one of those who thinks that there is bound to be many difficulties in regard to the proxy vote. Many of us believe that the proxy vote is the only possible solution of this question and the forms ought to be issued as suggested by the hon. Member for East Mayo. As these regulations are of great importance I want to know whether there is the slightest chance of our seeing them before finishing the Report stage. Already an enormous number of these regulations have been issued. I had the curiosity to ask an expert to take out the regulations issued in regard to the Bill itself apart from the Schedules, and they fill up five closely typewritten pages. In this particular case, as in the case of the alternative vote, everybody wishes to see these regulations made in such a way that the proxy vote will be useful and valuable to the men who will have it. Perhaps we may be told whether we shall see these regulations before we part with the Bill.

Mr. DICKINSON: The hon. Baronet has pointed out that one of the difficulties is due to the fact that we are having an alternative system and that we are having the postal and the proxy votes, and he also said that when we get to the Report stage we were going to see whether the postal vote is going to be retained. I hope the Home Secretary does not contemplate anything of the kind. The reason I have been objecting to the proxy vote is because I think the postal vote is the only effective one for giving expression to the opinions of the soldiers and sailors. It is all very well to talk about soldiers being able to give their proxies. We must remember that we have a Parliamentary election system with agents and parties, and we all know quite well what will happen. It will not be the soldier who will pick out his proxy quietly by himself and send it in from Mesopotamia. The party agents will get at him. The first thing the party agent will do will be to go through the list of absent voters, of whom there are a great many during the War, because all the soldiers are on the list. He will find out that there are 500 or 1,000 of his own colour, and his first

interest will be to see that those people give their proxies to the right men. If they are Liberals the Liberal agent will look out and see that their votes are given by a Liberal. The first point to be considered—this is what an agent told me—is the proxy. The proxy will be difficult to find. A man can only give a proxy to his wife or to an elector, and no person can have more than two proxies. You have to find 500 or 1,000 men who are going to vote straight. [An Hon. Member: "Or their wives!"] Yes, if you think that they will vote straight. First, the agent will communicate to the soldier and will say, "Will you kindly fill up this form and give me authority to apply for your proxy form, and I will see that you get a proper proxy form?" It will save the soldier a good deal of trouble, and he will probably do it. We know the voters very well. He will say, "I am a Rad. or a Tory, and so long as my vote is given the right side I do not mind." He will, therefore, send this form back and the agent will apply for the proxy form. He will send it to the soldier, and the soldier will sign it blank. There is not the slightest reason why he should not. If he is a good party man he undoubtedly will, because it will be important to him that the people at home should find out some proxy who, when required, will vote straight.

It is all very well to say that a new Order in Council is going to meet all these difficulties, but we are faced with them at the present time. We are justified in taking the words as put before us, and so far as I am able to see that will be the effect of the scheme as it stands on the Paper. The process will undoubtedly be lengthy. I do not see how it can possibly be anything else. It is almost impossible to conceive that you should have a proxy paper that has not been signed by the voter, although it does not say in these rules that it must be signed by him. At the same time, I do not think anybody will construe it otherwise than that the proxy paper has to be signed by the elector at some time or other. There are, therefore, under these rules two distinct occasions on which the distant soldier in Bagdad will have to sign a paper. First of all, the agent will write to him and send him the application form, probably made out in a way which suits the agent better than the public authorities, because this particular step will not affect the public authorities. Then he

will have to get the proxy paper and send it to the soldier, asking him to return it in blank form. It will come back, and will probably be filled up by the agent. That will complete the whole transaction. It is perfectly plain that it will take some time. Personally, I hope that the Government will insist upon the great mass of soldiers who have the opportunity voting by post. Do not let this proxy system apply except in very outlying districts, where it is impossible for the postal system to be of any use.

Colonel YATE: A great many difficulties have certainly been made out regarding this proxy vote, and I trust the Home Secretary will really take it into consideration, and simplify it so as to stop this double journey for one thing. The right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Dickenson) has told us his fear that the election agent will get hold of the proxy voters, and the hon. Member for Mayo (Mr. Dillon) has told us of the terrible fear that he has that the officer will somehow get hold of the soldier or that the soldier will go and ask the officer for his advice. All this has to be altered, and I trust that some simple rules may be arrived at. The one thing we have not done has been to provide against any voter falling out of the scheme in any way. Between the postal and the proxy system there is a great danger of men falling out and not coming under either or of being able to apply for their vote. I have not heard anyone say how that can be stopped. I think it ought to be definitely put into the Bill, so that all men will be secure of their vote.

Sir G. CAVE: Several new points have been raised, but before trying to deal with them, may I say that, according to our scheme, the registration officer must know whether or not a man has appointed a proxy. When he issues a proxy paper he has to make some mark against the voter who has got the proxy. That mark goes to the presiding officer at the election, so that when anyone comes in and says, "I am a proxy for Mr. So-and-so," the presiding officer looks at his list and sees that the elector has taken out a proxy paper. Then, and not till then, he says, "Very well, show me your proxy and I will see whether it is in order." According to our scheme it must somehow be known to the registration officer that a man has taken out a proxy paper, and so long as that proxy paper is out he does not send a ballot paper to the voter for

voting through the post. You cannot leave it open to a man to vote either by ballot or by proxy as he thinks fit. If he is an absent voter, he votes by post unless he has taken out a proxy paper. If he has done so, he votes by proxy only. That will be found to be so on looking at paragraph (c) of our Amendment. He may at any moment cancel his proxy, and he will then revert to the position of an ordinary absent voter and receive his ballot paper by post.

Mr. SAMUEL: Supposing he returns to this country, will he be disfranchised?

Sir G. CAVE: If he returns to this country, then, unless he gets back on the ordinary list, he votes by post.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: Is not the question whether an absent voter votes by post or by proxy decided by a geographical area in accordance with the Order in Council?

Sir G. CAVE: That is another point. I was answering the right hon. Gentleman and if he will look at Sub-section (3) he will see that the answer is that I have just given to him. A person entered on the absent voters' list will not be entitled to vote except as an absent voter. The two things in that Section and in paragraph (c) have the effect that I have pointed out.

Mr. DICKINSON: Would the right hon. Gentleman say when the registration officer would know that?

Sir G. CAVE: He would know it when the register was made out and he would know when he issued a proxy paper that the man was a proxy voter. Let me deal with the difficulties, which, although real, are not new to us, because we have had great discussions about this very complicated matter, and I do not think anybody would believe the difficulty there has been to find a way of giving effect to it. In saying that I am not saying that we have succeeded in solving the difficulty. Taking them in order of events if not in order of suggestion, the first point was that the voter in a proxy area ought somehow to be informed that he has the right to appoint a proxy. I quite agree that is very desirable. It is difficult to give that notice to the individual voter. It is not easy for the authorities at home to know what soldiers and sailors are living at any particular moment in that proxy area. They do not even know how many soldiers of a particular unit have

[Sir G. Cave.]
gone out. The registration officer will know, or the Army Council will tell him, that a unit is in that area, and either he or the Army Council themselves, I apprehend, will take steps to bring to the notice of the unit the fact that every member of it has the right to vote by proxy. The Army Council has shown the greatest readiness to help in this matter, and I am sure that they will do everything they can to bring the elector's rights home to him. Therefore, I am sure, when a unit is in a proxy area, that the military authorities will take care that the soldier—I imagine through his commanding officer—is informed that he has the right to appoint a proxy. That brings the right home to him. Then comes the substantial point about the double journey. I agree it is undesirable that you should have a system under which there should first be a letter suggesting an application for a proxy form, next a letter back, then a letter conveying the proxy form itself, and then a letter back again sending the proxy form signed. That would take a long time. It is desirable that the man should apply for the proxy personally or by an agent before the form leaves the hands of the authority or the authority's agent. I think the difficulty could be met if we put it within the power of the authorities to issue a number of proxy forms, say, to the commanding officer of the unit, or someone like that, who would hold them as agent for the registration officer until they were applied for. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Application forms?"] No; proxy papers, because the application could be made then and there to the commanding officer and the proxy paper could be issued by him. Thus you would save a journey and a half, so to speak.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: You would have an agent of the registration officer at the front?

Sir G. CAVE: You would have someone who would represent him. That is the kind of thing I should like to see brought about.

Mr. GILBERT: Would you make it compulsory on the commanding officer to make a return to the registration officer?

Sir G. CAVE: I should think the return would be sent to a central office in London, who would forward it to the registration officer. This work would be carried out with the help of the Local Government Board. With regard to sailors, we have

suggested a different method, into the details of which I would rather not go now. It is suggested that there should be a system of cards, and that to every ship should be issued a number of cards, one for every man on the ship. The cards would be retained there, and when an election is coming on every man would have a card informing him of his right to appoint a proxy. The proxy forms would be kept on board ship. I do not want to go into details now; I simply want to say that they have been very carefully considered, and that there is the intention on the part of all the authorities that full effect shall be given to the wishes of the Committee in regard to this matter. In reply to my right hon. Friend (Mr. Dickinson), I would say that, of course, the proxy must be signed by the principal. You cannot authorise some agent to appoint another agent for him. With regard to the publication of the lists of proxies, our view is against that, for more than one reason. First, we want the voter to appoint the proxy up to as late a date as possible before the election. If you are going to have a list, you must have a limited date up to which proxies can be appointed. Secondly, we see no reason why the public should be informed of the appointment of a proxy. The registration officer, of course, will know, and must know, that a proxy paper has been issued. If you are going to have separate lists published of the proxies—that is, of persons who have appointed proxies and of persons who have been appointed proxies—you open an altogether new field of election enterprise, because you will have the unfortunate proxy, who, after all, is respected by his or her principal, worried by canvassers, literature, and everything else which ought to go to the elector himself. If the proxy is already an elector he gets the literature on his own account. If the proxy is not an elector, if it is the wife or a relative only of the principal, we do not think he or she ought to be troubled in that way.

Mr. DICKINSON: How will the wife know where she is to vote?

Sir G. CAVE: She will take very good care to find out. If she is appointed for the purpose of voting she will know when an election day is coming on, and I have no doubt she will find out where to vote.

Mr. DICKINSON: But the ordinary elector does not know the polling station.

at which he has to vote. He is not told by the public authorities; he is always told by the candidate. If there is no list of proxy votes, proxy voters will not have the means of knowing in the ordinary way where to vote.

Sir G. CAVE: It is true that as the matter stands the proxy will have to find out how to exercise the proxy.

Mr. MCKINNON WOOD: Supposing the voter gives general directions to his proxy to vote Liberal, Labour, or Conservative, how is the elector to know anything about it except by receiving the literature?

Sir G. CAVE: I should have thought that the means adopted for giving publicity to the names of the candidates would be likely to reach anyone in the division. There would be the usual posters and newspapers which are likely to bring the information to their notice. However, I am not pronouncing a final opinion upon this matter, because it arises on an Amendment to the Schedule.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: It is a general question.

Sir G. CAVE: It can be discussed, but it cannot be decided now. I am very willing to listen to all the arguments on the point before we come to it.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: If there is no publication of the list of proxy voters, how are you going to see that the Clause of the Bill is enforced which provides that no proxy shall vote on behalf of more than two absent voters? Unless there is publication you cannot be sure that one person will not vote at different polling stations for many more than two absent voters.

Sir G. CAVE: Then the proxy holder would have committed an offence and be liable to imprisonment.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: But how can you find out unless you publish? We want to guard against the offence being committed.

Sir G. CAVE: A record will be kept of the proxies. I do not want to be drawn into a discussion of this matter if it can be avoided. I want to hear the arguments in regard to it.

Mr. GILBERT: If a proxy paper is filled up by a soldier serving abroad and he appoints his wife as his proxy-holder that

proxy does not go back to the registration officer, but is only shown to the returning officer when that person produces the proxy and claims to vote on behalf of the soldier. Has the Home Secretary any method by which he is going to provide a check that the person who produces the proxy paper is the person appointed by the soldier?

Sir G. CAVE: The person will be asked the question. It would be against the law to give a false answer. You must have the same machinery for the person appointed as a proxy as you have for the elector.

Mr. GILBERT: If there is no list published of the people appointed proxies, it will be quite impossible for the impersonation agent to check the votes.

Sir G. CAVE: That is an argument on the point which I was trying to leave open. I am being cross-examined before I have given my evidence-in-chief. I think I have dealt with the point. In answer to my hon. Friend (Sir G. Younger), I will consider whether we can put down the Regulations before the Report stage.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: There is one matter not yet considered by the Committee. What will be the position of those men in Mesopotamia who have appointed their proxies if a General Election takes place, as it very likely will during the period of demobilisation, and the units come back to this country before the election takes place? That is a contingency extremely likely to happen. I will put this point very briefly in order that hon. Members may have it in their minds. These men have appointed their proxies. They come back and go home. An election comes on. They may cancel their proxies if they wish, but then they will be in the category of absent voters and can only vote by post. The ballot paper can only be sent to the address given when the register was made up and, if anywhere, that address would be in Mesopotamia. Consequently, having returned home, they are prevented from voting themselves and have to see that their proxies vote for them. Is that not so?

Sir G. CAVE: No.

Mr. SAMUEL: What will happen?

Sir G. CAVE: The address will not be Mesopotamia; it will be the address of

[Sir G. Cave.]

the unit. The papers will be forwarded through the military authorities to wherever the unit is.

Mr. SAMUEL: Do you mean the address of the unit as such?

Sir G. CAVE: Yes.

Mr. SAMUEL: That would meet the point. We were not aware of that. I am very glad I have been able to elicit that point from the right hon. Gentleman. The Home Secretary has asked us now to express our view as to the necessity of the publication of the lists of proxies. There are three reasons, which appear to me to be weighty, in favour of the publication of the lists of proxies. In the first place, it has been thought necessary by the Government and by the Committee to lay down certain conditions and limitations that are to attach to the proxies. They must stand in a certain relationship to the voter, or they must be electors; they must not vote for more than two absent voters, and so on. How will it be possible to enforce those conditions and limitations if no one knows who the proxies are and for whom they are voting if it is regarded as a private matter between the voter and the registration officer, and if there is no opportunity for any third person to check the enforcement of those regulations? It is difficult enough, as we all know, to stop completely opportunities for illicit voting, either by personation or evasions of the election law under which a person himself has to come and vote. But where you have a proxy system of voting you may be giving additional and easy opportunities for all kinds of electoral abuses. You may be opening the door again to the old practices of sordid and corrupt electioneering. We may be quite sure that there will be many people in most constituencies who will be anxious to manipulate this voting system in favour of the cause to which they are attached. The only effective preventive, so far as there can be any, is publicity, so that the world, the personation agents and the critics of one party watching the doings of another, shall know who are the electors who have appointed proxies and who are the individuals who are to be entitled to vote on their behalf.

Secondly, when a person is to act on behalf of an elector, when he stands, so to speak, not in *loco parentis*, but rather in *loco electoris*, the candidate is entitled to inform him of his views and to acquaint

him with the fact that he is standing at the election. Can you contemplate a system under which there is a constituency in which there are 1,000 people who are going to cast votes in that constituency for "A," "B," or "C," who will never receive any election address from any candidate, who will have no electoral matter placed before them, and where they have none of those opportunities that the public have of acquainting themselves with the issues in those constituencies? That is open to very grave objection. You may scoff as you will at improper electoral methods, but surely it is important, when so grave a matter is being decided as the choice of a person to sit in this House to assist in the government of the country, that at all events a candidate should be allowed to tell those people who are going to vote for or against him what his views are and on behalf of what cause he stands. The right hon. Gentleman says that the proxy will only have to vote as directed. What can the direction be from a soldier in Mesopotamia, three, four or five months before an election takes place in a particular constituency? If he chances to know the candidates and if the candidates are settled at the time, he can direct his proxy for whom he is to vote. But a new party may come into existence. Two new parties have sprung into being within the last few weeks. If the voter is in Mesopotamia, how is he to direct his proxy whether to vote for or against the Vigilantes or the National party candidate, if such parties were not in existence in the happy days before he left these shores? You are not even going to allow this new candidate for a new party to approach the persons who are to be deputed to act.

Sir CHARLES HENRY: Must not the person who holds the proxy be an elector in the constituency?

Mr. SAMUEL: Not at all; the proxy may be the wife or, as is now suggested by an Amendment on the Paper, a parent, brother, or sister. The third reason why it seems to me that it is desirable to have recognised publicity of this list is that it would be so important for the party agents, if they can, to know who the electors are who have appointed proxies and who have been appointed on their behalf that they will use

7.0 P.M. every possible means to obtain that list, and there will

always be suspicions that one party or the other, being in the good graces of the presiding officer or one of his clerks, may have obtained a list of the persons appointed proxies beforehand in order to ascertain who are proxies, and canvass them and seek their support. If you want to avoid surreptitious practices of that kind, or the suspicion of them, it is far better frankly to say let the list be published so that everyone can have an equal opportunity to see who the persons are. I do not think any delay would be involved in this. The proxy paper can be perforated, one half to be sent to the proxy himself to act upon and to produce on the election day, and the other half to be sent to the registration officer in order to enable him to compile his list. I do not think this proposed arrangement would involve excluding a number of appointments to proxies. The list need only be published a few days before the election. It would be quite sufficient if the list were available, say, at the same time as the nominations or the issue of the writ. In these circumstances I hope before the Home Secretary comes to a definite conclusion he will give further and close consideration to the arguments for the publication of the list as well as the arguments against.

The **CHAIRMAN**: May I suggest that this question of publication is covered by the first Amendment on the Paper? It will come on after the Schedule has been read a second time, and it will be better if a discussion of this kind can be taken when the Committee can come to a conclusion on it.

Question, "That the Schedule be read a second time," put, and agreed to.

Mr. DICKINSON: I beg to move, in paragraph 1, to leave out the words "by the registration officer of the constituency in which the elector is registered."

May I ask the Home Secretary to explain exactly who he proposes shall issue the application form. The proposal is that it must be issued by the registration officer of the constituency in which the elector is registered. The right hon. Gentleman threw out the suggestion that it could be issued by an officer in Mesopotamia. Of course, the great difficulty of that would be that the officer would not know if the soldier is an elector on the register at all. I am very anxious that we should make this proxy paper as practicable as possible, and the Home Secre-

tary's suggestion seems to me to remove one very considerable obstacle in the way of the soldier getting his vote. Probably it would conduce to a better arrangement if we simply said it must be issued to some person on behalf of the elector and leave it to an Order in Council to say who is to issue it.

Mr. PETO: I think these words had much better stay in, and the words be added after them, "or some person duly authorised on his behalf." Then the ordinary course would be that the registration officer would issue it, and in the special case of troops in Mesopotamia it would have to be done through the authorisation of the colonel commanding.

Mr. DILLON: Why could it not be issued direct to the voter by the registration officer? I prefer the form in which it stands on the Paper. Why, in the case of troops in Mesopotamia or anywhere else, or of sailors on ships, should the forms be confided to the officer for distribution? I cannot understand why they cannot be sent by registered letter direct to the individual who has the right to vote. It is far preferable in every way that it should be so sent with full instructions. It is all very well to talk, but where strict discipline is in force, particularly discipline so severe as that to which every army in the field must submit, it is not desirable and it is not fair that the officer should go round and hand out these forms to the men himself. No doubt the vast majority of officers would be extremely careful to avoid anything even approaching undue influence, but what security is there that there may not be a certain proportion of officers who would misuse their normal power in handing out these forms and accompany them with advice and say, "So-and-so is your candidate," or "the proper party to vote for is the National party," or the party that has been friendly to the soldier. "Surely you are not going to vote for the men who tried to deprive you of the vote!" I think the only proper plan is for the registration officer to send the proxy form by registered letter to the man with full instructions.

Sir G. TOULMIN: The difficulty arises because this form is to be sent to an application made or authorised by the elector. It should be considered whether the registration officer should not send to every man a form on which he could say whether he was going to vote by letter

[Sir G. Toulmin.]

or whether he would appoint a proxy. If he had to send a form to everyone on the absent voters' list there would be no necessity to appoint anyone. (Interruption.) It appeared to me that it was the question of having to make an intimation to the man that he had to make application when the man was away from the country, both when the list was made and when the election took place, that caused the double communication to have to be made.

Mr. DILLON: Why should he make an application at all? There is no necessity for it.

Sir G. TOULMIN: The man has to get a paper somehow or other, on which he has to appoint the proxy.

Mr. DILLON: My suggestion is that the registration officer, when the register is made up, knows everyone who is in the geographical area that entitles him to vote by proxy, and my suggestion is that without waiting for an application at all, which is quite unnecessary, every man who is entitled to vote by proxy should receive a proxy form.

Sir G. CAVE: How can the registration officer know that?

Colonel GRETTON: The suggestion of the hon. Member (Mr. Dillon) is an impracticable one. Men in Territorial regiments do not come entirely from the locality which the unit bears. They come from various places, and transfers are constantly taking place. It would be quite impossible for a registration officer in this country to know what changes are taking place, say, in India at any particular moment. The only possible way in which the papers could be distributed is by an authority on the spot. The men know themselves the constituency in which they are entitled to vote. The proposal confines their choice of a proxy within a very narrow compass, and one or other of the persons to whom his choice is confined, as I understand, will forward the paper to be filled up. It will be the duty of the proxy to go to the registration officer to register the proxy and obtain authority to vote. The whole thing is quite simple. It will not do to do away with application direct to the registration officer because of the very large class of merchant seamen, fishermen and others, who are not in the

same position as soldiers or sailors on distant stations. Some provision is required to be added for the benefit of soldiers and sailors. There is no reason whatever to fear that an officer will be able, even if he desired, to exert any undue influence on soldiers in appointing proxies. The choice of appointment is limited. As a matter of fact these matters do not pass through the hands of the commanding officer in any way. He has many other things to look after. The papers will be handed out and distributed to the company officers, the non-commissioned officers, and so forth. The staff administration of a unit really takes very little interest in these things. They are matters which have to be carried out accurately, and they are liable to correction, and to have fault found with them if errors are made. The appointment of proxies is not like voting in an election.

Colonel HOPE: I hope the Home Secretary will favourably consider the Amendment. It seems to me a most simple matter to allow a number of forms to be kept, either by the military or civil authorities, to be given to the soldier or person entitled to a proxy at any time and let it be known publicly that he can apply for these forms and fill them up, one for the man whom he appoints and one for the registration officer. It must be initiated at the voter's end, and the registration officer only receive the intimation from the voter when he has appointed the proxy. If the voter is not on the register the proxy becomes null and void. It seems to me that that is a very simple way of doing it. The only requirement is some means of making public the fact that in the proxy areas that forms can be obtained in this way, and some means of securing that the signature of the voter is correct. It may be witnessed by the commanding officer or some civilian magistrate.

Sir G. CAVE: I agree with what the hon. Member for East Mayo says in some respects, but you cannot do exactly what he suggests in regard to the giving of notice to everybody in the proxy area. I do see a way in which it might be done, but I would like time to consider it. I do not see why the registration officer should not send to every absent voter a notice, saying, "You are on the absent voters' list. If you are in a scheduled area you may

vote by proxy. The areas scheduled at present are A, B, C, and so forth. If you are in one of these areas, and desire to vote by proxy, get an application form and send it to me for a proxy." That would save a great deal of time. It would only require that there should be a number of blank application forms, and all that the man need do would be to go to his sergeant-major and say, "I want an application form for a proxy." He could then fill up the form and say, "I have applied for a proxy in the name of So-and-so." That could be sent to his commanding officer, who might then authorise the registration officer to treat that application as an appointment by writing of the person mentioned. The registration officer might then issue an effective authority to vote to the proxy at home. In that way you would get one post only instead of four. This is only a method which occurs to me, and I should like to consider it further with a view to meeting the pertinent criticisms that have been made. Therefore, I hope that this Amendment may be dropped.

Mr. DENMAN: I hope that the Home Secretary will stick to his original guns. I think the scheme, as suggested originally, is quite excellent. Anybody who knows the organisation of units at the Front, knows the importance of keeping down individual correspondence to the minimum, the obvious way of getting proxy forms to the unit is to send them to the unit as such and then let them be distributed. There can be no possibility of any undue influence. In the capacity of adjutant I should have had to do the thing for my own unit. I would have let the whole unit know that these proxy forms were available if they wanted to apply for them. The men would have applied and got their forms, and would have filled them up with the assistance of the printed directions available, and the whole thing would have been done without any friction, with the greatest ease, and with a minimum of disorganisation of the work of the unit. Therefore, I hope the Home Secretary will stick to his original plan.

Mr. SAMUEL: One point arises out of what the Home Secretary has said. He has mentioned a scheme which seems to involve sending a very large number of forms, running into millions, to the soldiers in France and Flanders, none of whom would be able to use them.

Sir G. CAVE: Not a form, a notice.

Mr. SAMUEL: It means sending a vast number of communications to practically every man in France and Flanders, none of whom would be able to make use of them, because they would not be in proxy areas.

Sir G. CAVE: It has the advantage of telling the men what to do.

Mr. PETO: Would it be necessary to send notification to all the people in the merchant service who are on the absent voters' list?

Mr. DICKINSON: I only moved this Amendment in order that there should be discussion and I am quite prepared to withdraw it. I suppose that the Home Secretary would contemplate the proxy being signed by the soldier and authorised by some official. If a paper comes back with evidence on the face of it that it has been signed by the right person, that is all you want. If you get the proxy signed by the soldier and there is evidence that he has signed it, the question whether or not he is entitled to vote can be checked afterwards. The process which was adopted, as I understand, by Australia was that they were able to proceed upon the assumption that every Australian soldier had a right to vote because they had manhood suffrage. Every soldier was entitled to vote and he did vote for the person whom he wanted to vote for. He gave his name and address and particulars. These papers went back to Australia and there the whole thing was checked. If a man was not entitled to vote his vote was declared void, and if there was a mistake about a candidate that nullified the vote. The system was simplicity itself and it was very easily arranged. I think something of that kind might be done in the case of the British soldier. We want simplicity, and the best way to ensure that would be to have the proxy signed at the front, or in a distant part of the Empire, provided that there was evidence on the proxy who had signed it.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: I beg to move the Amendment standing in the name of my hon. Friend (Mr. Dundas White), in paragraph 3, at the end, insert the words,

"It shall be the duty of the registration officer to publish, in such form and on such dates as may be prescribed by the Local Government Board, a list of the persons appointed as proxies and of the electors by whom they have been appointed."

[Mr. Whitehouse.]

This raises the whole question of the publication of the lists of proxies, which has been discussed in a fragmentary way on the general Debate which took place in connection with the whole Schedule. May I submit certain points to the consideration of the Home Secretary which I think make it essential or highly desirable that the list of proxies should be published? In the first place, I think it would be impossible to avoid partial publication if the Bill stands as it is drafted. I think the representatives of the great political parties would probably know who the proxies were, or would know a great number of them; therefore I think it would be impossible to avoid partial publication. Full publication is very much more desirable. In the interests of the wishes of the voters represented by the proxies, publication is desirable. The late Home Secretary has referred to the extraordinary changes that are taking place in the grouping of parties, and the new parties that are springing into existence, and he said with great force that it is very necessary that the holders of the proxies should receive information and be made acquainted with the parties and the candidates appearing before the public, if they are to carry out the instructions they have received from the absent voter. For the prevention of corruption in the elections, the publication of the lists of proxies is necessary. Surely every reason which makes us publish the lists of persons entitled to vote, and every consideration that makes the voters' lists necessary, hold good in the case of the holder of a proxy who becomes a voter. There is no reason which makes us hold it necessary that there should be publication of the lists of voters which is not equally good when we consider the case of the proxies for absent voters. The same reasons hold good in each case. Therefore, I can see no logical reason for resisting the publication of the names and addresses of the proxy holders.

There is a very important provision in the Bill in connection with this novel departure in our electoral law, namely, voting by proxy, and that is that no person may vote as a proxy for more than two absent voters. How is that provision to be observed without publication of the list of proxy voters? I think the Home Secretary will see that this is a point of considerable importance, and that it is not only necessary to prevent deliberate fraud on behalf of the holders of proxies, but it is also

necessary in order to check genuine mistakes. How are soldiers at the front to receive the necessary information which will prevent them obtaining as a proxy someone who has already been chosen twice? That is a point which has not received any attention in the Debate so far. I can conceive it as being very probable that many soldiers knowing little about parties at home, or about the new parties at home, may be content to appoint as their proxy their own minister or clergyman. If they do so, they may probably waste their proxy, because the minister or clergyman would probably already hold two proxies. Unless you have publication of the names and addresses of the proxies appointed, you cannot enforce the provision in the Act of Parliament requiring that no person shall act for more than two absent voters. For these reasons, and especially because the experience we have got in connection with the publication of the ordinary voters' lists shows us the desirability of maintaining communication with the holders of the proxy, I beg leave to move the Amendment.

Sir G. CAVE: I believe there are very strong reasons for publication. While I say that, I do not want to accept this form of words, or the other form on the Paper, because there are objections to both. Rule 4 will be consistent with the scheme which I might sketch out. I would like to have some other words, and if the Committee will agree to the Amendment being withdrawn, I will undertake to bring up one on the Report stage.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: I am very much obliged to the right hon. Gentleman, and will withdraw the Amendment in view of his undertaking.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: In paragraph 5, after the word "wife," insert the words "husband, parent, brother, or sister."—
[*Sir G. Cave.*]

Mr. HOLT: I beg to move, in paragraph 5, to leave out the words "in which the proxy paper is to be used," and to insert instead thereof the words "or one of the constituencies in which the elector is registered."

The object of this Amendment is to deal with the case of the elector who has more than one qualification, so that he shall

appoint the same proxy in respect of every constituency. There are two reasons for this Amendment. An elector who would not vote twice in his own person in widely separated places should not be enabled to vote twice by appointing proxies. I do not think that anybody proposes that an elector voting by proxy should have an advantage in voting which an elector who votes in his own person would not have. A more powerful reason is that if an elector appointed a different proxy in every constituency in which he has got a vote it would be impossible in practice to prevent those proxies from voting more than twice. Under this Act no elector, whatever qualifications he has, is entitled to vote more than twice, but if separate proxies were appointed for each constituency they could all vote.

Sir G. CAVE: There is a difficulty in this. One reason for prescribing this is that the elector gets all the literature in the constituency in which he is to vote. Of course, that is an advantage. Another point is this: Suppose a man has two votes, one in Liverpool and another in London, this Amendment would allow him to nominate the Liverpool man to vote in London. How would the presiding officer in London know that the man from Liverpool was the right man?

Mr. HOLT: Because the man would be obliged to produce his appointment when voting. The effect of the right hon. Gentleman's proposal is that an elector registered in London and at Liverpool can easily vote in both places by proxy though he would find it very difficult in present circumstances to vote in both places in person. If he were registered both at Liverpool and Inverness he could not possibly vote in both places himself, though he could vote in both places by proxy.

Mr. DICKINSON: The man appointing a proxy should appoint only one proxy, and that one proxy would be in precisely the same position as the voter himself. In reference to the second vote, the returning officer has to ask the voter, "Have you voted more than once already in this election?" If it is permissible for a man to appoint one proxy in Liverpool and another in London, the London man could answer quite honestly that he had only voted once and the man at Liverpool could say the same, and there might be a third one in Glasgow and a fourth one some-

where else. The whole question is, is the proxy to stand in a different position from the voter himself? I do not think that he could be possibly justified in doing so. Even if the proxies themselves did not intend to deceive, they could not say whether any other proxy had voted for this elector in any other place, and no one could say. My hon. Friend's point is perfectly right, and the Home Secretary is bound to meet it.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: The point really is one of substance. Let us go to Mesopotamia again. A man there might have seven, eight, or nine qualifications in different constituencies. Under the existing law he would be entitled to vote many times at an election. We stop that now and say that no person living in this country shall in any circumstances vote more than twice; but if the man in Mesopotamia appoints five or six or seven proxies, so far as I can see under the Bill he is committing no offence at all. Though we are anxious to give all possible facilities to the soldiers abroad to exercise the proper electoral function, I do not think that we should go so deeply as that.

Sir G. CAVE: There is substance in it, though I have not heard any answer to my difficulty. Of course, my difficulty is not so great as the other one. I will consider what we shall do.

Amendment agreed to.

Further Amendment made: In paragraph 6, leave out the words "in the same constituency."—[*Mr. Holt.*]

Sir G. CAVE: I beg to move, at the end of paragraph 7, to insert the words "unless that person is the parent, brother, or sister of the absent voters."

Mr. DICKINSON: Does that mean that persons shall vote as proxies on behalf of more than two absent voters? Is the father of seven sons to be entitled to vote as proxy for everyone of them?

Sir G. CAVE: That is the point which was raised in Debate. It was said that it would be rather hard on these persons if they were not entitled to have their father as proxy. This is carrying out a promise.

Mr. SAMUEL: I do not object to the Amendment. It is not very desirable, but perhaps the disadvantages are less than the advantages. Supposing that the person is acting as proxy for a Friend and

[Mr. H. Samuel.]

is also acting as proxy for two brothers, would that fall within the provision? He might claim to vote for more than two, because he is the brother of two and a friend of the other. Is there any ambiguity, and will the words want to be changed? Perhaps the Home Secretary will consider it.

Sir G. CAVE: Yes.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. PETO: I beg to move, in paragraph 9 (b), after the word "constituency," to insert the words, "unless that person is the parent, brother or sister of the absent voters."

It seems to be clear from the last Amendment of the Home Secretary, that exactly the same words ought to occur here, because you do not want to make it a penal offence to vote on behalf of more than two voters in an election in any constituency if you are doing what has been already contemplated—voting because you are the parent of three or four sons.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: Perhaps this may be the only opportunity for raising this point. Do not you require some limitation of age? You obviously do not intend that a child should be able to vote, but a child may be the brother or sister of the absent voter. A wife may be under the age of twenty-one, but being a wife she is obviously an adult person. An elector must be over twenty-one. Now you are bringing in also brother and sister. People for fun may give their votes to small people to exercise on their behalf. That, I imagine, is not intended. I do not press the point now, but perhaps it will be considered.

Sir G. CAVE: Yes, I will consider it.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. PETO: I beg to move, at the end of paragraph 9 (b), to insert the words, "solicits or collects proxy papers that are not filled in with the name of the proxy appointed by the elector, or fills in or offers to fill in any proxy paper on his behalf."

I want to move this more by way of suggestion than with the object of pressing the exact words on the Home Secretary. In the course of these Debates the principal argument used against proxy voting

was that the elector would not of his own accord nominate the proxy, and complete his paper quite independently, but would give, so to speak, blank cheques, blank proxy papers, to some enterprising election agent, or possibly to some trade union official—so it was suggested by the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Holt)—and the whole thing would become part of the machinery, the not very honest machinery, of election. The intention of the Government, I take it, is that the person entitled to vote by proxy should exercise his own discretion perfectly freely within the limitations of the Third Schedule, and nominate the person he wishes to act for him, and complete his own proxy paper. Therefore, I would ask the Home Secretary whether he cannot look into these words and see whether it would not be desirable to stop the electioneering dodges which have been indicated as very likely to take place by making it illegal to offer to fill in a proxy paper or to attempt to collect a number—thousands have been talked of in the course of the Debate—in a single hand to be dealt out, as the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Cleveland (Mr. Samuel) said, necessarily only in twos, to electors whose opinions are known to be sound from the point of view of the person operating, and the person nominating knowing nothing about it and taking no interest in it beyond signing his name to a blank sheet of paper. I do not think blank sheets of paper should be handed about, or that election agents should be allowed to collect them and fill them up at their own sweet will. I certainly think this kind of electioneering—dealing in proxy papers in a wholesale manner—might be able to be stopped. I very much regret that I had not the opportunity, owing to my being away for a moment, to stop the other big leak in this Clause which I believe could have been stopped. I believe there are already provisions which may very much limit the abuses indicated in various speeches, and I hope the Home Secretary will consider at any rate stopping up this particular gap in the way I have suggested, or in some similar way.

Colonel HOPE: I should like to ask whether electors will be able to sign blank proxies, or whether the rule will be that when an elector signs a proxy he will also fill in the name of the man entitled to vote for him?

Sir G. CAVE: I have not got the Amendment in writing, but I gather it refers to filling in a proxy for someone else. If that be so it would be rather hard on the man who asks someone to fill in the particulars for him before signing it. Of course I will consider all the points suggested.

Mr. PETO: I should like to withdraw the Amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Colonel GRETTON: I beg to move, at the end, to add the words:

"14. The registration officer shall keep a list of the names and addresses of the appointed proxies and of the electors by whom they are appointed. Such list shall be available for inspection and copying."

Perhaps I may formally move this Amendment, which deals with the question of the inspection and copying of the registers of proxy voters. There will be great difficulty in bringing that list to the final point immediately previous to an election. There will be changes and additions to it constantly from time to time, and the final publication of the list at the last possible moment on the eve of the election will not give time to check the list for errors if any occur. It is desirable to give publicity as to who the proxies are, otherwise there may be all kinds of malpractices by ingenious persons and all manner of suspicions. Persons interested in the election should have access to this list as it is made up from time to time. I want to bring this point to the attention of the Home Secretary, and I hope it will be taken into consideration when he is drafting his Amendment on the whole question.

Sir G. CAVE: I think this matter may be dealt with at the same time. I should probably propose to apply to this list of proxies the rules we have applied to the register. That will cover inspection.

Colonel GRETTON: I am perfectly satisfied.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That the Schedule, as amended, be added to the Bill."

Mr. PETO: I should like to say one word to the Home Secretary before we part from the Schedule. There was one other leakage pointed out in the system

of proxy voting, and that depended on the proxy vote being able to be handed out to electors. I should like the Home Secretary very closely to consider whether in the case of a man who has got a wife or parent whom he could perfectly well nominate he should have the option also of passing over his wife or parent and nominating some other elector. If you confine his power of nominating an elector who is no relation to himself to the small number of cases of men who have neither wife, parents, brothers or sisters, then the whole of this fabric of the powers that would be placed in the hands of election agents of dealing with the proxy votes vanishes altogether. I should like the Home Secretary seriously to consider whether in the Fifth Clause of the Schedule he would not have been wise, as well as adding the words "parent, brother or sister" to have provided that only if the elector has neither wife, parent, brother or sister, then he may nominate some other person who is an elector in the constituency. I do not believe it would cause any hardship. A man should in the first instance nominate a suitable relation, say his wife, which is no doubt what in nine cases out of ten will be done, and only in exceptional cases of men not having any such relations should they be allowed to nominate somebody who is always talked of as his friend but who, as the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Cleveland suggests, would not be his friend, but somebody found for him by the election agent. All that kind of business connected with proxy voting is bad, and if the Home Secretary could see any way between now and the Report stage of stopping up that gap, I must say I think it would make the objections to proxy voting practically disappear.

Sir G. CAVE: Sometimes the man has a brother or sister, or even a wife, with whom he is not on very good terms, and whom he would not like to entrust with his voting power. To meet that case you would have to insert after "wife" "with whom he is on speaking terms." I do not think that would do.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion made and Question, "That the Chairman do report Progress, and ask leave to sit again," put, and agreed to.—
[*Sir G. Cave.*]

Committee report Progress; to sit again upon Monday next.

PETROLEUM (PRODUCTION) [PAYMENT AND EXPENSES].

Considered in Committee.—[Progress, 23rd October.]

[Mr. WHITLEY in the Chair.]

Debate resumed on Amendment to Motion [18th October], "That it is expedient to authorise the payment, out of moneys to be provided by Parliament, into the Petroleum Royalties Fund constituted under any Act of the present Session to make provision with respect to the searching and boring for and getting of Petroleum in the United Kingdom, of a sum equal to ninepence for every ton of Petroleum gotten on behalf of His Majesty, and of any other Expenses chargeable under such Act."—[Mr. Pretyman.]

Which Amendment was, to leave out the words "into the Petroleum Royalties Fund constituted," and insert the words "of Expenses incurred by or on behalf of His Majesty."—[Mr. Denman.]

Question again proposed, "That the words proposed to be left out stand part of the Question."

Mr. ADAMSON: I rise for the purpose of opposing this Resolution. I do not want to hamper the Government.

The CHAIRMAN: We are now on the Amendment.

Mr. ADAMSON: I do not want to hamper the Government in their efforts to secure all the petroleum possible under the provisions of this Bill. I think it is an excellent idea for them to prove the petroleum possibilities of this country. It is an article that is in very great demand under present conditions. The finish of the War will not end the demand for petroleum. It is of the utmost importance

for the purposes of our future industrial development that we should have as full a supply of this article as possible. There are, however, embodied in this Bill, which is to regulate the production of petroleum, certain objectionable features which cannot be agreed to as far as Labour is concerned. I venture to suggest to the right hon. Gentleman in charge of the Bill that the Government could not carry a measure of this kind through the House during peace times, and if that is so I think they are acting very indiscreetly in attempting to carry a measure of this character in war-time. In doing so I think they are in-

fringing the common understanding that we were to have no contentious legislation introduced during the War. I want, in the few moments of the time of the Committee that I am going to take up, to point out one or two of the features of this Bill which I think the most objectionable. For instance, in Clause 1 the exclusive right is reserved to His Majesty of searching boring for, and getting petroleum within the United Kingdom. I think that the powers conferred upon His Majesty, as head of the State, by this Bill should be carried a great deal further than is provided for in Clause 1. I think that he should not only have the right, as head of the State, to investigate the petroleum-bearing possibilities of the country, but that the ownership of all the petroleum found should be vested in him for the good of the State. This is a new mineral, and we are testing its possibilities for the first time. Suppose effect were given to my suggestion, I do not think it would prejudice the position of a single landlord in the country. I do not think that any of the landlords of the country were aware that there was petroleum, and that being the case it could not have enhanced the price that they were required to pay for their land.

The CHAIRMAN: This is a general speech on the Bill which cannot be taken now. We are only on the Money Resolution authorising the Committee to consider certain parts of the Bill. We are discussing an Amendment to that Money Resolution, and must keep to the minor point.

Mr. ADAMSON: I was simply taking the opportunity to point out that before I could agree to the Money Resolution there were certain alterations, important alterations, that ought to be made in the Bill. I do not intend to take up very much time of the Committee in doing so. I wanted to bring them under the consideration of the right hon. Gentleman in charge of the Bill, but if you, Mr. Whitley, say that I am not at liberty to do so, then I will content myself by saying that I hope the Government will agree to withdraw the Money Resolution until the objectionable features of the Bill have been remedied. There was only one other point that I wanted to mention particularly, and that was the fact that in Clause 2 provision is made for the payment of royalties for every ton of petroleum that is obtained. As you have pointed out that I cannot deal

generally with my objections to the Bill I hope that the Government will give serious consideration to its objectionable features and that they will agree to delay the Money Resolution until those objectionable features have been dealt with effectively.

Mr. CURRIE: My hon. Friend who has just spoken has been such a whole-hearted supporter of the War and of every good cause for some years that his colleagues in any case would have welcomed his appearance in the honourable position to which the members of his party have just called him; but I regard his first speech in that capacity as peculiarly calling for congratulation. I approach the subject from a different standpoint, and I wish, in the first place, to say that I think it rather unfortunate that the Government should be under the necessity—I dare say it is a necessity—of going forward with this Money Resolution without being able to say whether the royalties in question are to be made the subject of the excess taxes which fall upon excess profits during the War. I think that makes a very great deal of difference, and I regret more than I can say that the Government should have gone forward with this Resolution without giving an answer to this question. We are, of course, told that the question cannot be decided until the Government has consulted the Attorney-General. We have been promised that an answer will be given on Monday, and we must rest content with it. Nevertheless, it makes a difference whether out of every £100 of oil the State is or is not to get £80, and in the absence of an answer I find it difficult to apply my mind to the merits of the financial Resolution. It is quite true, as the hon. Gentleman (Mr. Adamson) said, that no landlord in this country ever paid the taxes on inheriting this petroleum, actual or alleged. The landlord has not been put to the cost of boring it, and so on. I think his title in these circumstances to see a whole new system of royalties created is not very substantial, and, looking at it from the highest and driest point of view of the rights of property, which I do not wish to invade, I have great difficulty in thinking that the Government is following the wisest course in creating royalties in respect of values which are themselves the creation of the War, which but for the prices to which petroleum has been pushed by the War would never have entered our imagina-

tion. The whole money value of the subject of this discussion is the very creation of the War, and I do not think in these circumstances that anyone, be he owner of land or not, should be enriched as a direct result of the War.

I find it hard to think that landlords themselves would really wish during the War to receive these royalties, and I think the financial Resolution should be curtailed in some way so as to fall in with the idea that during the currency of the War and perhaps for some time afterwards, these royalties should not be paid. That would give us a further opportunity to consider the matter. I do not think that during the War the landlords in England or the landlords in Scotland would readily wish to enrich themselves as a direct result of the War, especially if, as I understand, they are not, unless the Budget of next year brings some alteration, to be subject in respect of Excess Profits or Mineral Rights Duty to a corresponding extent. In dealing with a Resolution like this one is open to be asked to answer the question, "Have the landlords no rights in these matters at all?" I do not know that the rights with which this Resolution deals are well defined at all. I do not know that subterranean gases according to the law of Scotland, and according to the law of England, are the property of the landlord. I do know that certain kinds of subterranean water are not, but the matter is unexplored from the legal point of view, or at all events unexplained to this House, and in the absence of more explanation as to how the law of subterranean gases stands I think we are entitled to pause at this point and ask for some further information from the Minister in charge of the Bill.

When one considers the case of property in a general way one generally thinks of the owner of the land in the neighbourhood of which, or under the neighbourhood of which, these properties are situated, but after all there are other rights of property to be considered. This Bill and this Resolution do not in themselves create property. They may be transferring it from one person to another, and when one remembers that one thinks at once of the rights of other parties to the contract. It appears a hardship to the ordinary taxpayer and citizen, whose pocket has been interfered with, and necessarily interfered with, at every turn by the War, that having received no com-

[Mr. Currie.]
 pension for the damage inflicted upon him he is to be called upon to provide out of his pocket during the War, and as a result of the War, compensation to the owners of land who in many ways have not contributed to the creation of the value of the subject which we are considering, and with which this Resolution deals. I hope a great deal of explanation will be given by the right hon. Gentleman in charge of this Bill at this stage, but in any case I will appeal to him to see that any landlord whose income has increased during the War by the receipt of these royalties should be subject to Excess Profits Duty or to the corresponding Mineral Rights Duty. I think that unless a definite undertaking on that point is given the action of the Government in going forward with this Money Resolution to-night is unfortunate. Further, I want an explanation of the position of the legal ownership of these subterranean gases. I know, of course, that the primary object of this Bill is excellent, and I am not prepared to take the responsibility of blocking it and wrecking it. I wash my hands of responsibility for it, and I place it on the Government, who I understand are willing to accept it. In any case I think the Government should give answers to these questions before they press this matter forward, and I hope the right hon. Gentleman will give us some satisfaction on these points.

The SECRETARY of STATE for the COLONIES (Mr. Long): As the hon. Gentleman has made a touching appeal to the Government, I will respond to the best of my ability. I am not really the Minister in charge of this Bill. As a matter of fact, the Minister in whose charge the Bill is is my right hon. Friend the Civil Lord of the Admiralty (Mr. Pretymann), who was unable to be here before, and is unable to be here now. I am, therefore, doing my best to take his place. The hon. Gentleman asks us to pause, and says he thinks we ought not to go on with the Bill unless we can answer a series of questions with which I will deal in a moment. First of all, may I associate myself with the opening remarks of the hon. Member opposite, in which he offered his congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for West Fife (Mr. Adamson), who, after many years of excellent service in this House, has been appointed leader of the great party of which he is so distinguished a representative. I am sure that we all rejoice to see

him in that position, and hope that he will for many years live to perform its duties and enjoy it, though he will find, as others of us do, that the seat of a leader, or of one in responsibility, cannot always be regarded as matter of pleasure and enjoyment. My hon. Friend, in the observations which he addressed to the Committee, desired to raise the general principle of the Bill, and urged that we should not proceed with this Resolution now, but wait until we take the Bill, and then deal with the question which has been brought forward on this Resolution. Unfortunately, that is impossible. The Bill requires a financial Resolution before we can go further with it. Though no doubt it is legitimate to raise this question at this stage, it is none the less on the Bill itself that the occasion arises alike for making suggestions in the form of Amendments and for dealing with the general question raised as to payment of royalties for property of the character dealt with in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Fife wanted, I think, to review really the whole of the financial proposals of the Bill. Again I say that is impossible at this stage. There is nothing in our proposals which is as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and I shall be ready to advise my right hon. Friend, where there are any Amendments which can be properly inserted in order to meet the general wish, to do so. But I must point out to the Committee that I do not think that the facts are realised. There have been all sorts of suggestions about the origin of this Bill, for which I can assure my hon. Friend there is no foundation at all. I satisfied myself on all these points before I was associated with it as a member of the Government. There is nothing behind this Bill; it is not promoted in the interests of any individual, or any set of individuals. The facts are really and simply these: It is believed that there is petroleum oil in this country. It is very desirable, if that be the case, to get it with as little delay as possible, and in the most economical way possible. In a good many cases the owners of the land are under the impression that there is oil on their property, and they have entered into agreements that boring shall take place, and, if oil be got, they have acquired in return for this permission, the definite assurance that certain royalties will be paid to them. What is the position of the Government? I may say that I am

attacked, and my right hon. Friends in the Government are attacked, from both sides. We are attacked by those who object to royalties, and who think it is a very bad system, and we are also attacked, and bitterly attacked, by those who say we are taking away their property, which up to the present moment, under the arrangements which they have entered into in regard to these provisional agreements—

Mr. CURRIE: Were those provisional agreements entered into prior to the War, and before the rise of the price of petroleum caused by the War at a later date?

Mr. LONG: I should think they were all subsequent.

Mr. CURRIE: I should think so.

Mr. LONG: I should say that they are subsequent to the War, but I do not think any blame attaches to anybody in connection with the matter. Before the demand for these oils became so pressing and so insistent, I do not think anybody contemplated the idea that there was oil in this country, and that investigation and boring might be undertaken to secure it. I do not quite agree with my hon. Friend that this question is material. The question the Government has to decide is this, Are we going to leave things as they are or are we going to take powers which will give something to the State and something to the individual? That is what we are doing in this Money Clause. Individuals have got already, as they believe, a particular kind of property. To make it available for the State arrangements have been made by which they are to be paid certain royalties. I do not hesitate to say that in the proposals contained in this Bill we are giving these people very hard treatment indeed. In the first place, we are confining to the State absolutely the right to bore for oil, and, in the second place, we are fixing a royalty very much lower than anything which has been offered by any of these various competitors. I have seen some of the proposals—I do not remember the dates, but I think the hon. Member is right that they are all recent dates—and if the Bill does not pass then these arrangements which have been made will go forward. It is impossible to stop that. If they go forward we shall be confronted with all the difficulties that have arisen in other countries, notably the United States of

America. There are a great many people who believe that there is a profitable enterprise connected with the obtaining of this oil, and certainly if this Bill is not passed there will be competition going on, unhealthy competition, over the whole country. You will have much more money spent over these operations, as in the United States of America, where, I believe, the expenditure was 60 per cent. or 70 per cent. above what it ought to have been. Therefore, it seems that the only possible course is compromise; and, after all, most legislation is compromise. The compromise here, I must say, seems to me an eminently fair one. You confine to the State the right to bore for and obtain the oil. You then give to the individuals who have got the property, and who have made preparatory arrangements from which they would have derived great benefit, if oil were obtained, what is, after all, compared with the suggested royalties, a very much smaller sum. Under the Bill you put the royalties into a fund, and out of that fund you pay certain expenses. My hon. Friend asked us to tell him what would be the effect of taxation upon these royalties—whether they would pay the various taxes. I do not think that is a matter which we are called upon to answer now.

Mr. CURRIE: Whom else can I interrogate?

Mr. LONG: It has already been stated that the matter has been referred to the Attorney-General, who is to provide an answer on Monday. Surely it is a matter which is not one for those who are responsible for the Bill. The matter is one for the Exchequer and for those who are responsible for taxation. If the royalties are to be subjected to these various taxes it is for the Treasury, and not for my right hon. Friend the Civil Lord (Mr. Pretymann), who is merely in charge of this Bill as Chairman of a particular Government Committee. It is for the Treasury and the Exchequer to decide and enforce taxation, if taxation is enforceable. I do not know that it is. My hon. Friend says that it is a purely local question. However, it is before the Attorney-General, who is to give his answer on Monday. There will be ample time on the Committee stage, when this question which has been raised on the resolution can be brought forward and dealt with, I venture to say, much more conveniently. I can quite understand that

[Mr. Long.]

those who condemn royalties altogether do not like to see a revival of them, or what perhaps has not been unfairly called a new creation. I do not quarrel with that description, introduced at this moment. I know that many hon. Members opposite and who sit on the Front Bench hold the view just as strongly as I do that it is very desirable to get on with this question and to prevent all the exploitation and possible and probable waste of money which will follow if legislation is not introduced. Under the circumstances I would not make myself responsible for a Bill which did not offer royalties to those who are in the position in which the people are in to whom I have referred. So far as the Government are concerned, there is no choice between this Bill, subject, of course, to reasonable Amendments being introduced in Committee, and leaving things as they are at present. I do not pretend that the result of this Bill will be to give us large supplies of oil immediately. It may be that it will not give us anything for a considerable time, but if those people are right who hold that there is oil here, I think the Government would be very remiss if they did not take steps to provide for the proper explorations, borings, and finally acquisition of the oil.

I believe on the whole the compromise is a fair one. If the House is not prepared to pass the Bill in something like its present form, then it is quite obvious we must leave things as they are, which I think would be a great misfortune. I approach this matter quite unprejudiced. I have no feeling on the question. I examined all the proposals and statements as they were brought before me when I was asked to give a general supervision to the oil question in this House, and I have satisfied myself that this is a reasonable arrangement and a fair compromise. I hope that the Committee will be willing to pass this particular financial Resolution, always reserving to themselves, as of course they can do, the unquestioned right to deal in Committee with the matter and in such a way as they think right, and make such proposals as they think right. On behalf of the Government I may say we are prepared to consider any suggestion which is not likely to interfere with the successful working of the Bill, and to meet the general wishes of those who are anxious that the work should be done and fair play shown to all those concerned.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: The words of the right hon. Gentleman would, I think, be very acceptable to the Committee if they stood by themselves. He said that the Government would be very ready in Committee to accept any reasonable Amendments that did not interfere with the working practical application of this Bill and fair terms to all concerned. But earlier in his speech he said that so far as he personally was concerned he was determined that this Bill shall either provide for the payment of royalties to the surface owners of the land which might be petroliferous, or that it shall not be proceeded with. That is quite inconsistent with the concluding observations of the right hon. Gentleman, because he lays it down as an axiom that there can be no fair treatment of the property owners unless they receive royalties. We, on the other hand, who desire to argue in Committee on the Bill, as we have argued in this Resolution, that the owners can be quite fairly treated and can be paid for any damage done to the land, and can be paid for any loss of amenity to their land, and can be paid on generous terms, do not think that this occasion should be taken to establish a statutory right of surface owners to receive royalties on the natural resources of the land, which hitherto have been entirely untapped and undeveloped, and which, in fact, are to be developed and won by the money of the State or by the money of its licencees. I see more than one member of the Labour party sitting on the Treasury Bench who are members of the Government, and I do not know how they can square it with the principles they have always professed to support a Bill which provides for the creation of a wholly new series of royalties, in respect of a mineral which has never yet been obtained in this country.

I do not desire to repeat the speech which I made so lately on this subject or to develop the argument I then used. I only rise to say that I do not think the right hon. Gentleman ought to have put the House of Commons in this position of saying, "Either you must agree to payment out of the Treasury," and that is what this Resolution proposes, of royalties to surface owners, "or else you must leave the whole question alone." Why should we be limited to those two alternatives? Why should we not say to the Government, "We think that your Bill in essence is a sound and necessary Bill, and that there ought to be development of these

petroleum fields, and that we ought to prevent wasteful boring and competitive boring, such as exists in other countries, and that we ought to legislate, and legislate now, when the need for petroleum is great, precisely on the lines that the Government propose to secure that the boring shall be by the State, or by its licensees, but we think, when we come to the terms to be given to the surface owners that the right way to deal with the matter is not by payment of a new kind of royalty, and that there is no reason to acknowledge the full rights of property in a mineral which has hitherto been neither discovered nor developed, and which in the future may be discovered and developed by the money not of the surface owner but of the State and its licensees. That is the point raised by this matter, and I know that many hon. Members in all quarters, belonging to every party in the House, entertain this view very strongly, and I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman will find, if he insists on the proposal of a royalty, that the matter must necessarily become one of discussion and of controversy.

Mr. PRICE: I think we ought to congratulate the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for the Colonies on the moderation with which he has stated the case of the Government in contrast with the statement we had the other night. The right hon. Gentleman who has just spoken pointed out that what was in the land was untapped and undeveloped. I think I may add what is in the land is unknown to anybody at the present time, because actually no petroleum has been discovered. The object of this Resolution, as I understand it, is to enable the Government to devote a certain sum of money to find out what is in the land. That means that the State is going to undertake by the financing provided by this Resolution, to find out whether there is something in the land of which the owner is not at present aware. In the past it has been declared that gold, silver, and saltpetre belonged to the Crown, and I think it is a fair thing in this time of great financial stress that we should say that these unknown minerals, or whatever they may be, should belong to the State. There is no difference in doing so and doing that, as was done in days gone by with regard to gold, silver, and saltpetre, and that you should say if there is any petroleum, which is quite unknown at

present, that it should belong to the Crown. There is absolutely no difference of principle. I am quite sure when I say that that I am expressing the opinions not only of many hon. Members on this side of the House—or what used to be this side of the House—but of a great number of hon. Members of all parties in the State. We say that these undeveloped minerals or whatever is known to be in the soil at the present time should belong to the State. There was no time when we had a greater opportunity or there was a greater necessity for doing this than now. References have been made in these Debates to coal. I remember, some years ago, that a very high authority in Scotland informed me that it was only by a majority of one judge in a decision of the Court of Session that coal itself was not considered as belonging to the Crown. One can quite see that if the majority had been on the other side what an enormous difference it would have made to the revenue of the Crown at the present time had this undeveloped mineral, which was almost unknown at that time, belonged to the State. As things stand, if this Resolution is carried, it means that the State is going to embark upon an expenditure of money in order to find out what are really, if the arguments of the right hon. Gentleman be correct, are the possibilities of the soil—that is, that he is going to expend the moneys of the State, all of which may be thrown into the sea. If you are successful in your investigation the proprietors of the soil shall have the right to benefit. That is a magnificent thing for the landowners. Here is the State experimenting and spending its money; if it turns out wrong and you draw a blank the State bears the loss, whereas if the result is successful the landlords are going to get the benefit.

Mr. CURRIE: The landlords, of course, will not get the whole benefit.

Mr. PRICE: That does not affect my argument.

Mr. CURRIE: No, no, it does not, still—

Mr. PRICE: Therefore, my point is this: In view of the extraordinary statement made the other day by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that in the financing of this War if it had not been for America we should have found ourselves in a disastrous condition, I say there is no better time, nor a better opportunity, than the present to assert that the resources of the soil

[Mr. Price.]

belong to the State, particularly seeing no one can declare, if you pass this Resolution, that you are robbing any individual. Accordingly, I sincerely trust that this Resolution will be passed, because, it seems to me, that as things stand the State runs the risk of losing in the experiments, while at the same time the landowners will derive what benefit this experiment will bring about.

Mr. RUTHERFORD: I hope there will be no opposition to this Motion—

Mr. DENMAN: Yes, there will be!

Mr. RUTHERFORD: It is a perfectly simple matter. Until to-day, while there has been money for various expeditions, no one has taken the slightest trouble to ascertain what there is below the surface of this country. Even in the distance between here and St. Paul's Cathedral nobody knows really what is beneath the surface of the ground. Those of us who know anything about this particular subject know that almost on every occasion when anything has been done in connection with it hundreds of thousands of pounds—nay, I may say millions—have been thrown away in organised attempts to find out and develop what is below the surface. Here, for the first time we find, owing to expert advice, it is contemplated, with the smallest possible expenditure of money, that the ground shall be thoroughly searched in any likely places and that if there is any wealth of this

description it shall be found. I cannot conceive a more laudable object, nor a better scheme to carry it out, than what there is in this Bill which has passed its Second Reading.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: On a point of Order. Are we in order in discussing the object of the Bill generally, or must we not now be confined to the Amendment?

The DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN (Sir Donald Maclean): The subject was opened quite widely, and subsequent speeches have dealt with it on wide lines. It seems to me it is now time to come closer to the subject.

Mr. RUTHERFORD: I have only a few further sentences. It comes with a very ill grace from any section of the community, whatever their ideas may be about ownership of property and other matters which are not under discussion, that they should oppose such an excellent scheme without seeing whether there is anything of this description for dealing with the matter in a commercially sound, as well as scientific manner. I trust, therefore, that the Committee will see its way to pass the Resolution, having regard to the excellent objects to be obtained.

Question put, "That the words proposed to be left out stand part of the question."

The Committee divided: Ayes, 35; Noes, 44.

Division No. 101.]

AYES.

[8.43 p.m.]

Agg-Gardner, Sir James Tynte
Baldwin, Stanley
Barlow, Montague (Salford, South)
Barnett, Captain R. W.
Bathurst, Col. Hon. A. B. (Glouc., E.)
Blake, Sir Francis Douglas
Boscawen, Sir Arthur S. T. Griffith-
Boyton, James
Bull, Sir William James
Cawley, Rt. Hon. Sir Frederick
Cornwall, Sir Edwin A.
Craig, Col. James (Down, E.)
Craik, Sir Henry

Duke, Rt. Hon. Henry Edward
Fletcher, John Samuel
Gibbs, Col. George Abraham
Hewins, William Albert Samuel
Hodge, Rt. Hon. John
Hope, James Fitzalan (Sheffield)
Illingworth, Rt. Hon. Albert H.
Joynson-Hicks, William
Kellaway, Frederick George
Layland-Barratt, Sir F.
Long, Rt. Hon. Walter
Munro, Rt. Hon. Robert
Parker, James (Halifax)

Pease, Rt. Hon. H. Pike (Darlington)
Pennfather, De Fonblanque
Pollock, Sir Ernest Murray
Pratt, J. W.
Pryce Jones, Colonel E.
Rutherford, Watson (L'pool, W. Derby)
Scott, A. MacCallum (Glas., Bridgeton)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir A. H. (Asht'n-u-Lyne)
Swift, Rigby

TELLERS FOR THE AYES.—Lord Edmund Talbot and Capt. F. Guest.

NOES.

Allen, Arthur A. (Dumbartonshire)
Boland, John Pius
Bowerman, Rt. Hon. C. W.
Boyle, Daniel (Mayo, North)
Buxton, Noel
Collins, Sir Stephen (Lambeth)
Dillon, John
Doris, William
Duncan, C. (Barrow-in-Furness)
Field, William
Finney, Samuel

Flavin, Michael Joseph
Fleming, Sir J. (Aberdeen, S.)
Galorath, Samuel
Goddard, Rt. Hon. Sir Daniel Ford
Greenwood, Sir G. G. (Peterborough)
Harris, Percy A. (Leicester, S.)
Hearn, Michael Louis
Hinds, John
Hogge, James Myles
Holt, Richard Durning
Jones, Rt. Hon. Leif (Notts, Rushcliffe)

Jowett, Frederick William
Kenyon, Barnet
King, Joseph
Lambert, Richard (Wilts, Cricklade)
Lundon, Thomas
Macdonald, J. Ramsay (Leicester)
McGhee, Richard
Pearce, Sir Robert (Staffs, Leek)
Priesley, Sir W. E. B. (Bradford, E.)
Pringle, William M. R.
Reddy, Michael

Robinson, Sidney
Samuel, Rt. Hon. H. L. (Cleveland)
Scanlan, Thomas
Sheehy, David
Sutton, John E

Toulmin, Sir George
Wedgwood, Lieut.-Commander Josiah C.
Whitehouse, John Howard
Whitty, Patrick Joseph
Williams, Aneurin (Durham, N.W.)

Wilson, Rt. Hon. J. W. (Worcs., N.)
TELLERS FOR THE NOES.—Mr.
Denman and Mr. Dundas White.

Question proposed, "That those words be there inserted."

Mr. PRINGLE: I beg to move, "That the Chairman do report Progress, and ask leave to sit again."

I think, in view of the Division which has just taken place, it is obvious that the Government should reconsider their position on this question. The Committee, after a very full discussion, not confined to the evening sitting, but on the third occasion on which this question has been before us, has decided against the proposal of the Government. In these circumstances I think it would be futile to go on with the Resolution as it stands, and that the Government should have an opportunity of reconsidering its policy.

Mr. DILLON: I should like to say a few words in support of this Motion. This is, I think, the first time—in fact, I know it is the first time—that this Government has been defeated in the House of Commons. We were promised when this Government came into power that all kinds of blessings would result. I confess I have never been able to see any good result in any direction through the coming in of the present Government.

Sir E. POLLOCK: On a point of Order. Is this in order on the Question that you do report progress?

The DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN: So far I had not been able to observe it was in order, but I was hoping the next sentence or two would show.

Mr. DILLON: I will endeavour to bring it into Order by saying that, according to my experience, which is somewhat prolonged in the practice of this House—I daresay I am the senior Member present, having sat in this House far longer than any Member on the Treasury Bench I can see. I have been in thirty-seven years.

Mr. LONG: So have I.

Mr. DILLON: I did not recognise the right hon. Gentleman. I thought the Home Secretary was still in charge of the House. But, according to my experience, when the Government is beaten on an important question when the Government Whips are put on, and of which the House

has had full and ample notice—no Snap Division—that this particular subject was coming on, which is not a minor matter at all, it has been the universal custom that the House should adjourn in order to give the Ministry an opportunity of considering their position. It is on that ground that I venture strongly to support this Motion. Whether the Coalition Ministry or the new War Cabinet, after sleeping over the night, and taking ample time for consideration, will be of opinion that they are indispensable, which the "Daily Mail" does not consider to be the fact, or whether they will take an opportunity of consulting Lord Northcliffe by telegram as to whether, in his judgment, they are indispensable to the Government of this country, is a matter to which, I think, they ought to give some consideration.

Mr. LONG: I will not quarrel with the Motion made by my hon. Friend; in fact, he anticipated me—he was as rapid in his execution as he generally is. Nor do I wonder at the speech of the hon. Gentleman who has just sat down, and that, as we were beaten, he was unable to restrain his emotions for the moment, and was drawn into more than one error. I do not make any complaint of the fact that he did not remember I have had the honour of sitting in the House of Commons as long as he has, and I feel very much complimented by his telling me he mistook me for the Home Secretary.

Mr. DILLON: That was only because I am so short-sighted.

Mr. LONG: I know that I am rather conservative in my tendencies. It is perfectly true that when a Government is defeated on a Government Bill the invariable practice is to move to report Progress. [HON. MEMBERS: "Resign!"] No, not resign. I propose that we should accept the Motion which has been made, and in the meantime, with regard to this Bill, it will be the duty of the Government to consider what course to take in reference to it.

Mr. H. SAMUEL: I confess that I somewhat regret the course which the Government is taking on this Motion, because it seems to attach undue import-

[Mr. H. Samuel.]

ance to the incident which has just taken place. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] For my own part, I feel very strongly in regard to this principle, and I have always urged that the House should feel itself free to vote on the merits of quite minor points, such as the one which has been under discussion, and I do not think any Government ought properly to regard a division of this character as in any degree a vote of want of confidence in itself. Those who voted against the Government proposal in regard to this measure—I think I am speaking for a large number of Members—did so purely on the merits of this particular question. I spoke on the subject myself when it was before the Committee the other day, and I expressed at some length the reasons why I thought the proposal of the Government was wrong, and ought not to be accepted by the House of Commons in the present circumstances. I regret that the Government think it necessary not to proceed further with this Resolution now, and I hope they will not contemplate dropping the Bill—

Mr. DILLON: Resign—not drop the Bill.

Mr. SAMUEL: I hope they will not drop the Bill, the general principles of which are approved by the House.

Mr. DENMAN: We have had a discussion on this question upon no less than two evenings, and I should be sorry if the Committee were to leave this question now and not continue this very good work by accepting the further Amendment, which is merely consequential. It is quite true that it is the custom on an occasion like this to adjourn the Debate, but at the same time it must not be forgotten that this Bill is one which should be gone on with. The Money Resolution as amended enables a discussion on everything in the Bill except royalties, and I do not think we should waste another night on this Resolution when we might pass it to-night. I hope the Motion to report Progress will not be accepted.

Mr. CURRIE: Although I spoke rather strongly against the Government attitude on this matter I did not take part in the subsequent Division, because I did not wish to risk wrecking the Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, oh!"] I think the proper

course is to attach no undue importance to the Division which has just taken place, and we should go on with the Bill, which, I think, is necessary in a very high degree. I regard this as a war measure, and I may say that I have been warning the Government for the last few days that they would not secure even the support of many of their own friends for this royalty system. I do not think the Government should attach too much importance to what has happened.

Mr. HOGGE: An hon. Member has said that some of us forget that we are at war. Some of us remember that if we drop the present Government

9.0 P.M. we shall get on with the War.

If the result of this Division is the resignation of this Government, the prospects of peace will be very much nearer. I wish to dissociate myself from the speech which has been made by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Cleveland (Mr. Samuel), who represents nobody in the Liberal party to-day. We have voted on the principle which is involved in this financial resolution, and it pains those of us who have adhered to our faith, that a minister of the old Liberal party should get up and apologise for the situation which he and other Members of the House have put the Government in. We are very glad that the Government has been defeated. We have been longing and wishing for this opportunity to get rid of a number of people who are very dispensable, and whose disappearance from the Treasury Bench would be one of the greatest steps towards victory we could possibly have.

Sir GEORGE TOULMIN: The House is rather in a peculiar position owing to the vote which has just taken place.

Mr. DILLON: It is the Government who are in a rather peculiar position.

Sir GEORGE TOULMIN: The excitement of hon. Members below the Gangway is rather amusing. This is purely a business matter and nothing else. Although many of us object to these royalties, we support the Bill. If the Government consider that the form of the Resolution is unsatisfactory, there is no need for any apology whatever about it. Under similar circumstances I am prepared to vote against royalties on all occasions. If the Government consider it necessary to recast the form of the financial Resolution,

well and good. If not, they could have accepted the Resolution as amended and have gone on with the Bill, and I think that would have been the proper thing for them to have done. If the right hon. Gentleman had not somewhat hurriedly accepted the Motion and had taken the sense of the House, I think that would have been the decision we should have arrived at. If the Government decide to go on with the financial Resolution as amended, I think they will have the support of the Committee. The House desires that the Bill shall be passed without any royalties to private persons, and the vote which has been given by a considerable number of hon. Members to-night means that and nothing else.

Sir E. POLLOCK: I cannot help regretting the sort of forced levity with which this Vote is treated at the present time. I believe that a large number of Members, whichever way they voted, find the sort of attitude that is taken up by Members below the Gangway certainly distasteful at a time when we are at war, when we are anxious to get petroleum for our Fleet, and when it is important that the House of Commons should still maintain its authority and its composure. I am quite certain that I shall have support in all quarters of the House—I do not care which side hon. Members voted—if I enter a protest against the attitude which has been adopted of criticism of the Government at this moment, criticism which is ill-shaped, ill-timed, and ill-deserved, especially when the pretence is made that it makes no difficulty for them if you try to hamper their proceedings and to delay the efforts that they are making in matters that are vital to the carrying on of the War. Some hon. Members, who voted against the Government with a levity which they ought not to have had, are anxious to explain that they merely voted against royalties, but when thinking how they were going to vote they ought to have kept the true perspective in their minds and to have had some sort of sympathy with a Government who are carrying out their difficult duties and who do not desire and ought not to be placed in a position of weakness as it is claimed by one hon. Member below the Gangway they have been placed before the country and the Empire. I wish to enter that protest. If it be that the Colonial Secretary feels that the House ought to adjourn on this matter well and good, but I personally

regret it, because I feel competent that this Bill is necessary and ought to be passed as rapidly as possible. I very much regret that the House of Commons should to-night have interfered by what might be called a snatch vote. [Hon. MEMBERS: "No, no!"] I think some hon. Members had not thought fully what the result of their vote would be or they would not have given a vote to create a difficulty which I am certain is unfortunate. On those grounds, I venture to enter a protest, which, if it is not responded to, I am sure is felt in all quarters of the House.

The DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN: I ought to make it clear to one or two hon. Members who do not seem quite to understand that the Motion before the Committee is that I do now report Progress and ask leave to sit again on the main Question. That does not mean that the House itself should adjourn.

Mr. A. WILLIAMS: I very much hope that the Government will not insist upon adjourning the Debate at the present time. It seems to me that would give an exceedingly bad impression to the country. Many of us who voted against the Government on this occasion very strongly agree with the right hon. Gentleman the Member for the Cleveland Division (Mr. H. Samuel). We did not vote against the Government as a Government and as an agency for carrying on the War. We did not vote against the Bill as the proposed machinery for making this possible supply of petroleum available for the needs of the country, but we did vote against endowing the landlords of the country with a sum to which we believe that they have no just claim whatever. I have always been against this regarding vested interests in land, even when it could be shown that historically they had a very undesirable beginning, as they had in many cases.

The DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN: We cannot have a discussion on the main question on this Motion.

Mr. WILLIAMS: It seems to me that if the Government decide now to drop the Bill or to insist upon royalties being put back into it it will show that the needs of the country are being held up and that the Government are much more considering the interests of a certain limited class.

Mr. DUNDAS WHITE: The Government have taken the natural course in

[Mr. D. White.]

deciding to accept my hon. Friend's Motion. It is in the circumstances, of course, necessary that they should think over what will be their future position as regards this Bill. I venture to say that if a little more thought had been bestowed upon it at an earlier stage the present difficulties would never have arisen. I must protest against the observations that was made by the hon. and learned Member (Sir E. Pollock) who referred to this as a "snatch" vote. It is not a snatch vote in any sense of the word. The right hon. Gentleman opposite (Mr. Long) introduced this measure just before the House adjourned for the Recess. It was not circulated until afterwards. On the first day of the re-assembling of Parliament the Second Reading came on, and strong protests were made in various parts of the House against establishing a new system of royalties and of profiteering. It is against these new developments of royalties and of profiteering at this time of national need that this Division is a recorded protest. There was fair warning given on the Second Reading Debate. This is the third evening that my hon. Friend's Amendment has been under discussion. Not only so, but for several days questions have been asked, which of themselves would have been sufficient to put the Government on the alert. They have had the fairest possible warning of the very questions which have been raised, and which for the present have been settled by this Division. My hon. and learned Friend's reference to this as a "snatch" vote can only be regarded as a traversery of the facts. The right hon. Gentleman intimated that if we were not prepared to give royalties to the landlords then the Government would not go on with the Bill. I was astonished that the right hon. Gentleman should have made any observation of that kind. Here we are at war. The Government say, "We want petroleum. We want to get on with the getting of petroleum from under the soil of the United Kingdom." What has been the position of even the severest opponent of this Bill? We have expressed our willingness to give the Bill general support on all points except this. We have been willing to give the Government any power that they do not possess. We have been willing to pay the cost of getting the petroleum out of public money and to

reimburse the landlords for any loss of capital value in the surface, or any loss due to subsidence, or any loss of a similar kind, but they say, "No; that is not enough."

Sir H. CRAIK: On a point of Order—

The DEPUTY - CHAIRMAN: I was assuming that the hon. Member was directing his argument against the Motion to report progress; otherwise, it is a discussion on the general question.

Mr. WHITE: I thought it was clear that my argument was directed against the suggestion that the Bill should be dropped. The Bill can be gone on with.

The DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN: That is not the point before the Committee.

Mr. WHITE: I submit that the Government, who presumably have now an open mind on the subject—

Mr. HOGGE: No mind at all!

Mr. WHITE: May be prepared to give way to this consideration. They say they want to go on with the Bill. I am telling them—I submit that on this Motion I am entitled to do so—that even the severest opponents of the Bill are willing to do all that, but that what they are not willing to do is to pay royalties which are really in the shape of blackmail.

The DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN: That is not the question before the Committee.

Mr. WHITE: It is a very wrong position to take up that they should get the Bill on these terms and get it without any difficulty and to ask us to adopt the position the right hon. Gentleman has taken up, that unless royalties are paid they do not desire to go on with the Bill.

Mr. DILLON: I strongly support the Motion to report Progress. The hon. and learned Member (Sir E. Pollock) thought fit to give a wholly new turn to the discussion. He proceeded to lecture on high patriotic grounds those of us who support the Motion to report Progress, and I conceive I have the right to defend myself and others in the Committee who have taken that line and to say that we are entitled to take it. The hon. and learned Member had the amazing audacity to assert that this was a Snatch Division. I cannot remember in the history of the House a

Division which could less justly or properly be described by that name. It was a Division of which every member of the Committee had ample and repeated notice. The subject has been under discussion for days. It has been postponed from day to day, and it was fixed for to-day on long notice, precisely because it was known by every Member of the House that this contentious subject would come up. [An Hon. MEMBER: "It was on the Government Whip?"] What have we seen in the Committee to-night? It is a thing we are entitled to take notice of in supporting the Motion to report Progress. The Government are deserted by the whole of their supporters in the House. In endeavouring to estimate the significance of this Division we must take into account the fact that the Government succeeded, after issuing a Whip on a question known to be contentious, a War measure, as they allege, on which this contentious question, not affecting, as the hon. Member has pointed out, in the least degree the value of the Bill as a War measure, but affecting a question where the landlords of this country say, "We shall even in this hour of extremity allow the petroleum if it be there, to be provided for the country unless we get our royalty"—

The DEPUTY-CHAIRMAN: I would remind the hon. Gentleman that that line of argument is out of order.

Mr. DILLON: I will not pursue it. We are entitled to say that this was not a snap Division, that ample notice was given, and that the Government had picked their followers to carry this very point. What is the result? It is right that the public should know, because the public undoubtedly will be told to-morrow morning that everyone who voted against the Government in this Division is unpatriotic.

Mr. HOGGE: A Bolo.

Mr. DILLON: The public should know, and we are entitled to state it here to-night, that what happened was that the Government issued their Whip and that after ample notice of the contentious character of this proposal was given, the Government had thirty-five men in the Lobby. Of those thirty-five, twenty were paid servants of the Government, so that they only succeeded in getting, out of the 670 Members of this House, fifteen unpaid men to support their proposals. If that

be true, and if the hon. and learned Member (Sir E. Pollock) is justified, as I say he is not justified, it is an outrageous thing to turn round on us and lecture us from his pedestal as being unpatriotic. What is to be said of the men who did not respond to the Government Whip? What is to be said of the salaried officers of the Government, because they are upwards of fifty in number? If the men who are drawing salaries from this country had come down in response to the Government Whip, they could have beaten us in the Government Lobby, but because we voted in accordance with our convictions on this question we are to be denounced as unpatriotic, while the followers of the Government who would not respond to the Government Whip and the salaried servants of the Government who would not take the trouble to come down here and vote in the Lobby are patriots! I am sure they will be at it in the newspapers denouncing us as unpatriotic. I must apologise to the Secretary of State for the Colonies for mistaking him for so inexperienced a Member of the House as the Home Secretary. It was entirely due to the fact that I cannot see across the House. I thought the Home Secretary was in charge of the House. I heartily congratulate the Secretary of State for the Colonies on coming back to the House again and I am very glad to see him in charge of it. The right hon. Gentleman showed a true appreciation of Parliamentary practice and of public decency in supporting the present Motion.

Question put, and agreed to.

Committee report Progress; to sit again upon Monday next.

The remaining Orders were read, and postponed.

Whereupon Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Sir Donald Maclean), pursuant to the Order of the House of the 12th February, proposed the Question, "That this House do now adjourn."

Question put, and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Twenty-three minutes after Nine o'clock till Monday next, pursuant to the Order of the House of the 12th February.

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