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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

WEDNESDAY, 31st OCTOBER, 1917.

Vol. 98.—No. 132.

OFFICIAL REPORT.



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HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Wednesday, 31st October, 1917.

[OFFICIAL REPORT.]

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

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS.

WAR.

WAR SERVICE DECORATIONS.

11. Colonel LESLIE WILSON asked the First Lord of the Admiralty the conditions under which chevrons or badges for active service will be issued to the Navy and Royal Marines?

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the ADMIRALTY (Dr. Macnamara): The Admiralty have under consideration the nature of the badge or distinctive mark which should be adopted, and the conditions under which it should be granted?

Colonel WILSON: When does the right hon. Gentleman think they will be able to give definite instructions on this subject?

Dr. MACNAMARA: There will be no undue delay.

23. Sir JOHN SPEAR asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if Territorials who volunteered for service abroad and who were in consequence sent to India will be awarded the chevron on the same conditions as if they had been sent to France?

Mr. MACPHERSON: The chevrons will, subject to the conditions already published, be issued to soldiers who have served in a theatre of war. For this purpose India is not regarded as a theatre of war.

Sir J. SPEAR: Is it not a fact that these men enlisted for home service only; that they volunteered for foreign service, and were ready to go to France, and the

Government deemed it right for them to go to India? Having regard to the disappointment caused to these men, will he further consider the matter?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I am aware of all those facts; and I will bring those representations before the proper authority.

Mr. HOGGE: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a great many of these men have seen active service? India is an active theatre of the War, and does the hon. Gentleman suggest that the War Office pretends that the Territorials who went to India to relieve the old Regulars, who went to the front, ought not to have the chevron?

Sir J. SPEAR: Arising out of the unsatisfactory replies, may I give notice that I will raise the question on the Motion for the Adjournment to-night?

Sir JOHN JARDINE: Will those who have served in Mesopotamia, especially those who have fought in campaigns, receive the award under the same conditions as those who have fought in France?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Yes, Sir.

34. Mr. GRANT asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he will consider the desirability of differentiating by some distinctive mark between a decoration gained for services rendered in military operations on sea or in the fighting line on land and a similar decoration gained in administrative work?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 18th October to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Antrim East, to which I regret I can add nothing at present. The matter is under consideration, and I cannot make any definite statement.

41. Mr. HOGGE asked whether men who have been discharged from the Army will be entitled to wear the chevrons for the duration of the War to which they would have been entitled had they remained in the Army?

Mr. MACPHERSON: The chevron is to be worn with uniform only.

45. Colonel LESLIE WILSON asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the fact that a decoration is to be granted to the Army for services rendered in France in 1914 to commemorate the deeds of the Old Army as it was then constituted, the

[Colonel Wilson.]

29th Division and other Regular units which participated in the operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula will receive any special decoration for those services?

Mr. MACPHERSON: This decoration is not being given, as stated by my hon. and gallant Friend, to commemorate the deeds of the Old Army. It is a recognition of the special services rendered to the Empire by the military forces under Field-Marshal Lord French's command—which included Territorials—engaged in the operations in France and Belgium in the critical phase of the War which ended with the first battle of Ypres.

Colonel WILSON: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that last week I was given an answer saying that this medal was being given to commemorate the deeds of the Old Army; is he not aware that the 29th Division performed deeds unequalled and unparalleled in the history of the whole world, and is it proposed that their services should be ignored?

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. Member is arguing the matter.

Captain A. SMITH: May I ask whether the 29th Division performed any better services than others, and will he consider the deeds of the 42nd Division?

NAVAL AND MILITARY PENSIONS AND GRANTS.

13. **Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE** asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether he can say if the wives of civil subordinates (labourers) ordinarily employed at the Royal Naval Hospital, Stonehouse, and now on active service are entitled to the recent bonuses; and, if so, will he take the necessary steps of circulating the information so that these women may know their position in this respect?

Dr. MACNAMARA: The recent war increase granted to civil subordinates serving at the Naval Hospitals is payable as an addition to the balance of civil pay in the cases of those married employes now on active service who are entitled to draw civil pay. General instructions to this effect have been given.

15. **Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE** asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether he has received an application from the widow of an engine-room artificer who lost his life on board a submarine; whether he is aware that this man's parchments showed fifteen consecutive V.G.'s for character and nine V.G.'s for ability, and that this man joined the Royal Navy in 1901 and lost his life on 6th July, 1916, having completed fourteen years 225 days' service; and whether, in view of the fact that had he completed the whole fifteen years he would have been entitled to a good conduct medal and £15 gratuity, he can see his way to award the medal without the gratuity so that the children may have something to cherish to the memory of their late father?

Dr. MACNAMARA: The application referred to has been received, and the facts regarding the man's services are as stated. The Regulations as to the award of the long service and good conduct medal require a minimum period of fifteen years' service with continuous V.G. character, and the man in question was, I am afraid, ineligible for the award. It is inevitable that disappointment must be caused when a man is prevented by death from fulfilling the service qualification laid down for an award, but the Regulations are specific on the point. There is a misunderstanding as regards the gratuity. After a medal has been awarded an engine-room artificer commences to earn a good conduct gratuity at the rate of £3 a year for each year of further service with V.G. character, and it would therefore take at least five years to earn the maximum gratuity of £15. Even if this particular man had survived to obtain the medal, he would have had to serve for at least an additional year before he became eligible for any gratuity at all.

Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE: Does not the right hon. Gentleman think that, in view of the peculiar services of this man—that he went down in a submarine and only had 100 more days to serve—the Lords of the Admiralty might consider the advisability of granting the Good Conduct Medal?

Dr. MACNAMARA: I have asked the official concerned whether the rule has ever been departed from, taking into account the shortage of 100 days, and I am told that it has never been done; but I will go into it again.

Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE; Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in naval warfare, before the present war there were no submarines?

79. Mr. J. P. FARRELL asked the Pensions Minister if he will state the cause of delay in awarding the pension allowance to Mrs. M'Manus, Killoe, county Longford, mother of Sergeant J. M'Manus, No. 4850, 1st Battalion, Irish Guards, who was killed on the Somme some twelve months ago; whether he is aware that this man was a policeman who had some bank savings and also back pay and allowances at the time of his death, not one penny of which his friends have received, although his mother is old and poorly off; and will he undertake to expedite this case for the benefit of the dependants?

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the MINISTRY of PENSIONS (Sir A. Griffith-Boscawen): I am obliged to the hon. Member for having brought this case to my notice, as there is no record relating to it in the Ministry, and no application has been received. Immediate investigation of the case is now being made.

Mr. FARRELL: May I inform the hon. Gentleman that I myself, on behalf of the relatives, placed the facts of this case before the Department three months ago?

Sir A. GRIFFITH-BOSCAWEN: I am not aware that the hon. Member wrote to the Department. I have no record.

Mr. HOGGE: Why has the widow of this soldier to make an application at all?

Sir A. GRIFFITH-BOSCAWEN: Because in some cases we do not get the necessary information from the Record Office.

Mr. HOGGE: Does the Department ever get any record at all about the widow from the Record Office?

Sir A. GRIFFITH-BOSCAWEN: The point is this. In the case of a widow we get the information. This is the case of a mother, and as a general rule application has to be made.

81. Mr. J. P. FARRELL asked the Pensions Minister why the dependants of Driver John Rush, No. 217184, Royal Field Artillery, serving in France for ten months, who left his sister, Mrs. B. O'Connor, Newtowncashel, 3s. 6d. a week

out of his pay, have not got the other grants to which they were entitled, although they are nine in family and were solely dependent on this soldier before going to the front?

The FINANCIAL SECRETARY to the WAR OFFICE (Mr. Forster): I very much regret the delay that has occurred in this case. The soldier's claim unfortunately went astray after dispatch from the Pay Office, and the pension officer reports that he has now recovered some of the lost documents from the Post Office. The claim will be investigated at once, and, if established, will be put into payment at the earliest possible date.

Mr. FARRELL: Can the hon. Gentleman say when?

Mr. FORSTER: I am afraid I cannot give any date.

82. Mr. HOGGE asked the Pensions Minister whether he has any information with regard to J. G. Guy, No. 4686, now an inmate of Craw Road Poorhouse, Paisley; whether he is aware that he was discharged on 1st May, 1917; that he wrote to Chelsea in June and had a reply stating that it would be weeks before his case could be settled; that seven weeks later he got a form to fill up; and that he has since written three or four letters and received no reply, in consequence of which he has been compelled to go into the workhouse; and whether he can say what steps he is taking generally to prevent this degradation to old soldiers?

Sir A. GRIFFITH-BOSCAWEN: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for calling attention to this case. I have not had time since he put his question down to get information as to the cause of the delay, but I have given directions to have the matter investigated immediately, so that the man may be awarded his appropriate pension or gratuity, as the case may be.

Mr. HOGGE: While I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for what he has done, does he not think the pension authorities ought to take some precaution to prevent discharged and disabled soldiers from landing in the workhouse? Will he as a precaution get the Department to ask all workhouses in the country to intimate at once to the Pensions Department, whenever a discharged soldier turns up there, so that his case may be dealt with within a few hours?

Sir A. GRIFFITH-BOSCAWEN: I can only say I greatly regret the delay in this case, and as regards the hon. Member's suggestion we will certainly consider it.

HOSEMAKERS' WAGES (DEVONPORT DOCKYARD).

14. Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether he is aware that the wages of the hosemakers in His Majesty's Dockyard, Devonport, range from 29s. to 30s. a week; that these men average from thirty to thirty-five years' service; and whether, in view of the fact that they are mechanics and that their work is of a special class, he can see his way to place them with regard to wages on the same footing as skilled labourers in His Majesty's dockyards?

Dr. MACNAMARA: The application from these employes is under consideration.

Sir C. KINLOCH-COOKE: Can the right hon. Gentleman say how long this application has been under consideration, and does he anticipate the opportunity of an early reply?

Dr. MACNAMARA: It cannot have been under consideration for a long time, because it arises out of the increase we gave to the skilled labourers, and that did not take place long ago.

GERMAN RAIDERS (NORTH SEA).

16. Mr. LYNCH asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether, in consequence of the success of the German raiders in the North Sea, he has taken any disciplinary measures or effected any changes of personnel at the Admiralty, or taken any steps of reorganisation tending to prevent a recurrence of such incidents; and, if not, whether he will state his intentions with regard to his own tenure of office?

Dr. MACNAMARA: My right hon. Friend the First Lord hopes to deal fully with this incident in the course of his statement to the House to-morrow.

Mr. LYNCH: Has my right hon. Friend considered this point? As the Admiralty draws the veil of mystery over their whole proceedings we can only judge by results, and one of those results has been deplorably bad.

Dr. MACNAMARA: If my hon. Friend will wait to hear the First Lord's statement he will not find there is any mystery about it. Quite the contrary.

Mr. PRINGLE: Will the First Lord deal with the allegation that the inadequacy of the patrol is due to a deficiency in fuel?

Dr. MACNAMARA: I myself have seen that stated. I think I can deny that at once, whether the First Lord deals with it or not.

Mr. WATT: Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether the principle of the new First Lord is that everything done by his Department is perfect, and nothing deserves censure?

Dr. MACNAMARA: I do not know how by the wildest flight of imagination that could possibly arise out of anything I have said.

ROYAL NAVY (PROMOTION).

17. Commander BELLAIRS asked the First Lord of the Admiralty, in view of the fact that promotion from commander to captain is the final occasion when selection for promotion operates in the Navy, whether he can state if the decision to promote a commander is arrived at by a selection board, and, if so, who compose it?

Dr. MACNAMARA: Promotions from the rank of commander to captain are made in batches twice a year, and the selection is made by the First Lord of the Admiralty on the advice of his naval colleagues on the Board. Apart from this, a few promotions to captain are made at other times for very special war services, and these are not necessarily referred to all the Sea Lords.

18. Commander BELLAIRS asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether the Board can now see their way to lay upon the Table the Report of the Committee on Promotion presided over by the late Lord Goschen in 1902; and whether, in coming to a decision, he will bear in mind that the ex-First Lord of the Admiralty desired its publication?

Dr. MACNAMARA: The present Board of Admiralty adhere to the view held by their predecessors that it is not desirable to publish the Report, which is now fifteen years old. It may be added that Lord Goschen, who presided over the Com-

mittee, said that he was quite content to leave the question of any publication entirely to the Admiralty.

19. Commander **BELLAIRS** asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether he is aware that the Board have power to select captains or commodores for promotion; whether he is aware that the Board have power to give to any captain the temporary or local rank of rear-admiral or a higher rank; and whether the Board will exercise those powers if the interests of the country demand it?

Dr. **MACNAMARA**: The Board of Admiralty are fully aware of the powers which they possess under the Crown, and will continue to exercise them in the best interests of the country and of the Naval Service.

Commander **BELLAIRS**: But the right hon. Gentleman does not state specifically that they have got those powers. Is it the case that they have got those powers, and can exercise them at any time?

Dr. **MACNAMARA**: I think that is so.

TERRITORIAL ASSOCIATION SECRETARIES.

21. Colonel **L. WILSON** asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether ex-Regular officers who belong to the Reserve of Officers and who, before the War, were appointed secretaries of County Territorial Associations, are eligible for promotion under A.C.I. 1,252, of 1917; and, if not, will he, in view of the fact that such officers have frequently volunteered for active service, but that it has been found impossible for county associations to spare them from their numerous duties, issue instructions enabling these officers who have rendered signal service to the country to be promoted in a similar manner to those ex-Regular officers on the Reserve who are recalled to Army service?

The **UNDER-SECRETARY of STATE for WAR (Mr. Macpherson)**: The question is already under consideration.

NERVE STRAIN.

24. Mr. **KING** asked whether it is proposed to retain in the Army all cases of

nerve strain occurring among soldiers, with a view to keeping them under treatment in military hospitals till recovery is complete?

Mr. **MACPHERSON**: The policy is to retain all cases likely to be categorised as fit for some form of military duty. Those likely not to be so fit are retained until they can be transferred to the Pensions Ministry.

25. Mr. **KING** asked whether it is proposed to recall for treatment, under military control, soldiers invalided through nerve strain who have already been discharged from the Army?

Mr. **MACPHERSON**: No, Sir; I am not aware of any such proposal.

80. Mr. **KING** asked the Pensions Minister whether instructions have been given to local committees to provide appropriate convalescent homes for ex-soldiers suffering from nerve strain who have been discharged unrecovered to their homes?

Sir **A. GRIFFITH-BOSCAWEN**: Local war pensions committees are empowered to provide convalescent treatment for discharged disabled men whatever the nature of their disablement. The policy of providing special institutions for the class referred to, except in so far as they are suffering from neurasthenia in a severe form and are in need of special medical treatment is, in the opinion of my advisers, open to serious question. The provision of convalescent homes generally is, however, stated to be inadequate in certain districts, and I am instituting inquiry into the matter with a view to remedying the deficiency where it exists.

MILITARY COURTS-MARTIAL.

26, 27 and 46. Mr. **SNOWDEN** asked the Under-Secretary of State for War (1) whether he will take steps to amend the Army Act, 1881, so as to provide that all offences against military discipline shall be tried by a military judge and a jury of soldiers instead of by courts-martial consisting solely of officers; (2) whether, in view of a recent judgment of the court of Cassation in Paris quashing the death sentence and all the proceedings of a court-martial in 1914, though the death sentence had

[Mr. Snowden.]
 been carried out, he will give facilities to relatives of soldiers executed for alleged offences against military discipline to examine the records of the courts-martial by which such sentences were imposed, with a view of securing a revision of the sentences and the clearing of the reputation of the executed men; (3) the Prime Minister whether he is prepared to recommend to the Army Council the advisability of amending the Army Act so that death sentences cannot be passed upon men who, being engaged in defending their country, should be immune from death penalties for alleged infractions of discipline?

Mr. MACPHERSON: The reply is in each case in the negative.

Mr. SNOWDEN: Does the hon. Gentleman consider it satisfactory that men should be condemned to death after having been tried by men who have no experience of weighing evidence?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I cannot accept the facts as my hon. Friend has placed them before the House. I can assure him that all my investigations have led me to believe that trial by court-martial is one of the fairest.

Mr. FARRELL: Is it not a fact that, in the case of Irish soldiers, one man named Hope was executed under cruel circumstances?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Of course, I am not aware of this particular case.

Mr. FARRELL: I have brought it to the notice of the House before.

Mr. MACPHERSON: Assuming that the hon. Member has brought it to the notice of the House before, I can assure him that in each case where the death sentence takes place the most careful and most thorough investigation is made.

Mr. PRINGLE: Can my hon. Friend say how long it is since he became prejudiced against the ordinary legal methods of procedure?

Mr. MACPHERSON: As a matter of fact, I am not dealing with civil life. I have been connected with civil life as well as my hon. Friend. I am dealing with what is the law of the land. This is in the Army Act. It has been passed by this House year after year.

Mr. FARRELL: Will the hon. Gentleman say whether such sentences are referred to the Army Council as the supreme authority in this country before being carried into effect?

Mr. MACPHERSON: They go up by various stages to the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief.

Sir J. JARDINE: Is it the practice nowadays to refer court-martial proceedings in which sentence of death has been passed for the consideration of the Judge-Advocate-General, as used to be the case?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Not necessarily.

SOLDIERS' LEAVE.

30. Sir JOHN JARDINE asked whether any arrangement exists for granting leave home to Great Britain and Ireland to the many officers and men in the Regular and Territorial Armies who, in many cases, have been away in India and Mesopotamia for two or three years, and may have spent two years or more in the fierce heat of the places on the rivers of Mesopotamia, and are in need of a change to their native air?

Mr. MACPHERSON: It is only in the most exceptional instances that leave is granted to this country from Mesopotamia. A fairly large percentage of the troops there have been allowed to proceed on leave to India, but even this leave is necessarily restricted by the same lack of transport, which makes leave to this country practically impossible. As I stated recently, my Noble Friend the Secretary of State has been specially interesting himself in the question of leave from distant theatres of war, in the hope that it may be possible to facilitate leave.

75. Mr. BUTLER LLOYD asked the President of the Board of Trade whether his attention has been called to the fact that many men on leave from the front arrive at the large railway centre at Shrewsbury on Sundays and are unable to proceed to their homes in consequence of the absence of train service on that day; if he is aware that gentlemen, at their own expense, have up to now motored these men to their homes, in some cases as far as forty miles, but owing to lack of petrol are no longer able to do so; and whether, under these circumstances, he will allow the chief of

the police a small amount of petrol to be used for this purpose and no other, in order to save this tedious delay to our soldiers, whose leave is in most cases of short duration?

The **PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY** to the **BOARD OF TRADE** (Mr. Wardle): I will have inquiry made into this matter, and consider whether any steps of the nature suggested are necessary.

MILITARY SERVICE.

PRIESTS AND DEACONS WITH THE FORCES.

31. Sir **J. JARDINE** asked whether under any Army Council Instruction having the force of law on the subject of calling up to and exemption from military service different rules are enjoined as regards persons ordained to priests' and deacons' orders in the Church of England as by law established, on the one hand, and persons in that church and in the Roman Catholic Church who have taken definite religious vows not recognised by the ecclesiastical laws and customs sanctioned by Parliament, on the other; and if he can specify any monastic orders which qualify for exemption?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Persons ordained to priests' or deacons' orders, whether in the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church, are men in Holy Orders, and within the exceptions to the Military Service Acts, provided that they were ordained before the appointed date applicable to them. As to persons who have taken definite religious vows, under current instructions, if they are working under religious vows and are officially recognised by the authorities of their denominations, they are not called up without reference to the War Office, or, as from the 1st November, to the Ministry of National Service, when each case is investigated and decided on its own merits.

ARMY RESERVE (CLASS W).

33. **Mr. BUTCHER** asked whether men are still being transferred to Class W, Army Reserve, under what circumstances, and up to what age; whether men in Class W receive any pay; and whether, so long as they remain in that class, they are eligible for pensions or are entitled to receive any financial help from the local War Pensions Committees?

Mr. MACPHERSON: The answer to the first part of my hon. and learned Friend's question is in the affirmative. There is no age limit. Men in Class W. receive Army pay for their first week of civil life, or first two weeks if transferred in substitution; they are eligible for a pension if found to be suffering from a disability due to Army service. The answer to the last part of the question is in the affirmative, subject to certain conditions. I will send my hon. and learned Friend a copy of the regulations on the subject, which will give him fuller details.

Mr. SNOWDEN: Are they entitled to a pension when still in Class W, or must they be discharged?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I have said that they are eligible for a pension if found to be suffering from a disability due to Army service.

Mr. HOGGE: Is my hon. Friend aware that a great many of these men transferred to Class W are suffering from actual wounds and the loss of a leg or an arm, and while in Class W they cannot get their pension? Will he make the men who are transferred to Class W, suffering from these disabilities, eligible for pensions at once?

Mr. MACPHERSON: That is a very large subject and it would be more appropriate to address that question to the Minister of Pensions.

Mr. HOGGE: I do not know that the hon. Gentleman is right in assuming that this question comes within the purview of the Minister of Pensions. They are in Class W and are in the Army.

Mr. MACPHERSON: I will carefully consider the question along with the Pensions Minister.

Mr. SNOWDEN: Is it not a fact that the Pensions Minister made strong representations to the War Office against this scandal?

Mr. MACPHERSON: My own impression is that all these men are discharged. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] If my hon. Friends will give me any specific cases I will have them carefully inquired into.

REPATRIATED SOLDIER.

39. **Mr. RAMSAY MACDONALD** asked whether a repatriated soldier who has been a prisoner of war is entitled to a

[Mr. R. Macdonald.] full discharge; and, when these men secure employment on condition that they are discharged, why obstacles should be put in their way?

Mr. MACPHERSON: A repatriated soldier who has been a prisoner of war is considered for purposes of discharge in the same manner as any other soldier. I am not clear as to what my hon. Friend refers to in the last part of the question. Perhaps he will give me further details.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS.

40. **Mr. R. MACDONALD** asked whether the War Office has instructed its representatives as to what age a person has to reach before he has a conscience; and whether it is with the War Office concurrence that the military representative at Birmingham has appealed against the exemption granted to Harold Russell Simmons, stating as his reason for doing so that Simmons is too young to know what conscience means?

Mr. MACPHERSON: No instructions of the nature of those referred to by my hon. Friend in his question have been issued to military representatives. My hon. Friend will no doubt appreciate that the age of a person claiming exemption on conscientious grounds is an important factor which should be considered, and the Central Tribunal have so decided in one of their reported cases.

43. **Mr. SNOWDEN** asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he will take steps to stop the conduct of the officers and non-commissioned officers of No. 1 Northern Company, Non-Combatant Corps, France, who consistently pursue a policy of persecution and coercion of the men, with a view to breaking their resistance to combatant service and forcing them to transfer to other units, seeing that the men, having by persistent hard work and exemplary conduct kept their part of the bargain, are determined to resist this persecution if it is continued?

Mr. MACPHERSON: If my hon. Friend will give me specific instances, I will consider the matter, but he will realise that it is impossible for me to make inquiries into general allegations of this nature.

Mr. SNOWDEN: If I send the hon. Gentleman particulars will the men be protected?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I have already told the House that if any hon. Member cares to send me particulars relating to any case the soldier would be immune from disciplinary action.

Mr. PRINGLE: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a soldier who sent a letter to a Select Committee of this House was punished, and that punishment still stands against him?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I know nothing about that. I am speaking for myself. If hon. Members write letters to the War Office about a particular grievance concerning a soldier, the soldier will be immune from disciplinary action.

Mr. PRINGLE: Is it not a fact that the Army Council have refused to cancel that punishment?

47. **Mr. SNOWDEN** asked the Prime Minister what answer the War Cabinet has returned to the memorial submitted from Dartmoor to the War Cabinet on behalf of the conscientious objectors employed in Home Office camps; and whether he will circulate the memorial to the House as a Parliamentary Paper?

The **SECRETARY OF STATE** for the **HOME DEPARTMENT** (Sir George Cave): The Prime Minister has asked me to reply to this question. The memorial referred to complained of the work allotted to the men employed under the Committee on Employment of Conscientious Objectors, and asked that the men should receive certificates of exemption from all forms of military service and should be freed from the contingency which alone enables the Committee to maintain discipline among them, namely, that in case of misconduct they should be returned to prison or to the Army. These are proposals which the Government cannot entertain, and no answer has been returned to the memorial. I do not propose to circulate it.

56. **Mr. EDMUND HARVEY** asked the Prime Minister whether nineteen New Zealanders, conscientious objectors to military service, have, after serving a term of imprisonment in New Zealand, been forcibly deported to this country and confined in irons at Sling Camp, Salisbury; and that some of these men have already been sent to France; whether this is in accordance with the promises made by the late Prime Minister and other Members of the Government; and whether steps will

be taken to return these men from France and to treat them in accordance with the procedure set up by the Government in other cases?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I understand from the New Zealand authorities that the only class of conscientious objector recognised there are: "Those who have been members of a religious body, the tenets and doctrines of which religious body declare the bearing of arms and the performance of any combatant service to be contrary to Divine revelation, and that, according to their own conscientious religious belief, the bearing of arms and the performance of any combatant service is unlawful, by reason of being contrary to Divine revelation." No conscientious objectors coming within this category have been sent to England from New Zealand. Ten men who did not fall within its terms recently arrived with reinforcements, but under New Zealand law are treated as soldiers.

Mr. DENMAN: Will the hon. Gentleman point out to the authorities responsible for sending the men here that conscientious objectors are not wanted in France?

Mr. MACPHERSON: No. I am not prepared to interfere with the discretion of the New Zealand Government.

Mr. SNOWDEN: Is it a fact that these men were placed on shipboard in New Zealand in irons?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I have no information to that effect.

Mr. PETO: Is there any prospect of the Government taking the same sensible view with regard to this conscientious objector question which is taken by the New Zealand authorities?

87. **Mr. SNOWDEN** asked the Home Secretary the reason for not allowing conscientious objectors who are granted leave under special circumstances the subsistence allowance of 1s. 7d. per day, in view of the fact that these men are only receiving 4s. 8d. per week wages and cannot provide their own subsistence when on leave out of such an amount as this?

Sir G. CAVE: The hon. Member is misinformed. The Committee on Employment of Conscientious Objectors are not under any obligation to provide for the subsistence of a man to whom leave is granted in special circumstances; but

where a man to whom such leave is granted could not otherwise provide for his own subsistence, or where the provision of his subsistence would entail substantial hardship on his relatives or friends, the Committee have discretion to grant, and do grant, an allowance up to a maximum of 1s. 7d. a day.

MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS.

44. **Mr. WATT** asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether it is the practice of the medical examiners to pass for soldiers men who have only one eye; and, if so, can he say how many soldiers with this disqualification are at present in the Army?

Mr. MACPHERSON: My hon. Friend is right in suggesting that some men with only one eye have been passed for the lower categories of combatant service, those known as B 1 and C 1; but none of these are now being passed for any category of combatant service. At the present time men who have lost the sight of one eye, if otherwise fit, are passed only for one or other of the auxiliary services of the Army.

Mr. HOGGE: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are many men in the front trenches to-day with only one eye? I am speaking of the front trenches, and not of London.

TRANSFERS.

60. **Mr. WATT** asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether soldiers who volunteered for the Motor Transport as far back as 1914, and have been three years in the theatre of war, are now being transferred to Infantry battalions after two or three weeks' training and their places taken by newly-arrived conscripts; and, if so, whether this is, in the view of his Department, the best way of utilising the motor engineering skill of the first-named men?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Young men of Category A are being transferred from the Army Service Corps Mechanical Transport to the Infantry under the Army (Transfers) Act, 1915. Men are tested before transfer to ascertain whether their skill as motor engineers justifies their retention.

Mr. WATT: Does not this mean a breach of contract with these men? Is the conscience of the War Office never troubled about such matters?

Mr. MACPHERSON: There is no breach of contract. The Army authorities are entitled to transfer any man from one unit to another under the Army (Transfers) Act.

Mr. HOGGE: In transferring these men can the Army authorities reduce their pay if they still remain efficient at their old jobs?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I am not quite sure of that. Perhaps my hon. Friend will put down a question.

FOX-HUNTING.

32. **Mr. W. THORNE** asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that discontent has been expressed with the arrangement made by his Department to preserve and maintain the wasteful and food-destroying sport of fox-hunting; that tons of valuable oats are, in consequence, being used to feed thousands of horses that will never be required by his Department; that the working classes regard this arrangement as an evasion to preserve aristocratic sports at the expense of the nation's food supply; whether, as the public have had to abandon county cricket, and the majority of football, and most race meetings, he will see the injustice of his Department's attempt to preserve this sport; and whether, instead of this arrangement with masters of fox-hounds, he will take steps to place the Army horse supply on a business-like footing which shall not entail a waste of the nation's food?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I explained to my hon. Friend last February the vital necessity to the Army of maintaining hunts, and I am afraid I can add nothing to what I then said. The object in view is the continuance of the breeding and raising of horses suitable for cavalry work. The Army have moreover claim on all horses used in hunt establishments which are suitable for military purposes, and I cannot agree with the sanguine hope expressed by my hon. Friend that it will never be necessary to make this claim effective.

BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR (TURKEY).

35. **Brigadier-General CROFT** asked the Under-Secretary whether his atten-

tion has been called to the condition of the British prisoners captured at Kut; and whether any proposals have been made for the exchange of prisoners with Turkey?

Mr. JAMES HOPE (Lord of the Treasury): The condition of all British prisoners of war in Turkey is a matter of constant anxiety to His Majesty's Government. We have repeatedly approached the Turkish Government on this matter, and we have expressed our willingness to send representatives to meet representatives of the Turkish Government for the purpose of discussing terms. I am sorry to say that so far we have received no definite reply.

General CROFT: Has the question of the exchange of prisoners been suggested?

Mr. HOPE: The suggestion to exchange prisoners was made many months ago, but the reply of the Turkish Government suggested proposals which made the whole thing futile.

Mr. GEORGE FABER: Have we more Turkish prisoners than they have British?

Mr. HOPE: I think so.

BRITISH-MADE GUNS (USE BY ENEMY).

37. **Mr. HOUSTON** asked the Under-Secretary whether he has any information regarding the use by the enemy of British-made guns and shells in France or Flanders against our forces?

Mr. HOUSTON: It has been definitely ascertained that a British 4.5-inch howitzer, captured by the Germans on the Eastern front, was being used by them in Flanders at the beginning of October.

Mr. HOUSTON: Has my hon. Friend no further information except in connection with one gun?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I gave the House and my hon. Friend the one piece of definite information that I had.

ITALIAN FRONT (BRITISH TROOPS AND GUNS).

38. **Mr. HOUSTON** asked the Under-Secretary whether he has any information as to the number of British troops and

British guns, if any, taken prisoners and captured by the German and Austrian forces on the Italian front during the recent enemy advance?

Mr. MACPHERSON: No information has been received from Italy of the loss of any British troops or guns. I am glad to say that the latest reports indicate that the British guns have been successfully withdrawn.

COURTS-MARTIAL (DEATH PENALTY).

42. **Mr. SNOWDEN** asked the Under-Secretary if he will have inquiry made into the case of late Private No. A/6730, 2nd Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers, who was sentenced to death after trial by court-martial to be shot for on active service deserting His Majesty's service, and who was executed on the 29th day of August last, seeing that this soldier was only twenty-one years of age and five months before he had been invalided home suffering severely from shell shock; if he will ascertain if the offence for which this young man was executed was that when he was on his way to the trenches a shell burst close by him, and, being already completely nerve-shattered, he walked away from his regiment; and if he had since his return to the front up to the time of his desertion suffered terribly with pains in the head?

Mr. MACPHERSON: No, Sir; I am not prepared to interfere with the discretion of the Field-Marshal Commanding in Chief, who only confirms the proceedings in cases of this character after the fullest consideration.

Mr. SNOWDEN: Is the War Office prepared to allow a scandal like this to go without inquiry, where a mere boy overcome with nervousness was executed?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I have not all the facts at my disposal, and I have not had time to read the case, but, having gone into a number of these cases sympathetically, I am convinced that in each case the utmost consideration was given to the relevant facts, brought forward very often by medical officers. I am quite convinced that cases of this sort are most carefully considered.

Mr. CHANCELLOR: Does the hon. Gentleman think he is considering the interests of the Army by sending shell-shocked soldiers back to the front?

Mr. HOGGE: How is it that young lads of tender years who fail in their duty are shot, while generals are promoted?

Mr. KING: As the hon. Member has admitted that there are numbers of these cases—

Mr. MACPHERSON dissented.

Mr. KING: The hon. Gentleman admitted that he had looked into numbers of these cases, and therefore there must be numbers; and, if there are numbers, will he consider the setting up of some committee or tribunal which will consider them generally, especially in view of the very strong feeling on the subject?

Mr. FARRELL: Has the hon. Gentleman considered these cases after the execution or before?

Mr. PRINGLE: Has the hon. Gentleman investigated the allegations in this question?

Mr. MACPHERSON: As I have already stated, I have had no opportunity of investigating the facts of this case.

Mr. SNOWDEN: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that this information was communicated in such a way as to make it offensive?

Mr. TENNANT: Is it not the case that no execution of this kind takes place without the whole of the facts being brought before the Field-Marshal Commanding in Chief?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Not only is that true, but the case is carefully investigated in all its aspects, legal and otherwise, before it comes to the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief. The Field-Marshal is just as anxious about the lives of his soldiers as my hon. Friend who is putting this question, and my right hon. Friend, who was two or three years at the War Office in my position, will, I think, support me that in each case the greatest possible care is taken and everything possible that can be said in favour of the man accused is put forward.

Mr. PRINGLE: Does the hon. Gentleman think it fair—

Mr. SPEAKER: Hon. Members had better put down any further questions.

INDIA.

CURRENCY NOTES.

1. Sir J. D. REES asked the Secretary of State for India whether currency notes of smaller denomination than Rs.5 have yet been or when such will be issued; and at what figure the silver reserve at present stands?

The PRESIDENT of the BOARD of EDUCATION (Mr. Herbert Fisher, replying on behalf of Mr. Montagu): The first issues of the new notes—for 2½ and 1 rupees—will probably be made at a very early date. The silver in the paper currency reserve on the 22nd October stood at 2,914 lakhs (£19,427,000).

TEA IMPORTS.

2. Sir J. D. REES asked the Secretary for India whether he can give the House any information regarding the action taken by the Government of India or the Government of Madras upon the resolutions of the United Planters' Association of Southern India asking that the import of outside tea into British India should be prohibited in order to relieve the situation caused by war conditions and the present restriction of imports; that the Government should purchase the stock of coffee now remaining in India; and that early attention should be given to the question of providing a fair share of available tonnage for the export of tea, coffee, and rubber from Madras, Tuticorin, and Malabar ports?

Mr. FISHER: The question of excluding foreign tea from India has been considered, but it has been decided to take no action. The position has already been improved by the provision of increased shipping facilities, and should be further improved by the proposed arrangements for ensuring regular supplies to this country. Measures have been taken to relieve the situation created in the coffee industry of Southern India by import restrictions. The prohibition has been relaxed to the extent of half this year's crop, and notwithstanding freight difficulties a fair amount has been shipped. Special measures for the storage of the unshipped portion of the crop have been taken. No proposals to purchase unsold stocks have been received from the Government of India. The latter part of the hon. Member's question should be addressed to the Shipping Controller.

WHEAT ELEVATORS.

3. Colonel YATE asked what steps are being taken by the Government of India to further the erection of wheat elevators in India?

Mr. FISHER: I understand that the Punjab Government are constructing, as an experimental measure, an elevator at Lyallpur, the centre of the wheat trade of the Punjab. The War has delayed its completion. Until the system has been practically tried, its suitability to Indian agricultural conditions cannot be confidently predicted.

TOBACCO FOR SOLDIERS (DUTY).

4. Colonel YATE asked if presents of tobacco and cigarettes sent to soldiers in India are admitted free of duty; and, if so, why the same privilege is not accorded to the officers?

Mr. FISHER: The concessions already granted are as stated by the Secretary of State in reply to the hon. Member for the College Division of Glasgow on 21st June last. After careful consideration of various proposals, the Government of India have decided that they cannot further extend these concessions.

Colonel YATE: Is it fair to allow presents of cigarettes and tobacco for soldiers to go in duty free and not to give the same privileges to officers?

Mr. WATT: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this privilege is granted by France to our soldiers and officers, and ought not India to treat them as well as France treats them?

Mr. FISHER: I was not aware of the fact.

ROYAL INDIAN MARINE.

5. Colonel YATE asked the Secretary for India whether the petition presented to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India in May, 1916, by the commanders and senior lieutenants of the Royal Indian Marine has yet been considered; and, if so, whether he can now state the terms of the reply?

Mr. FISHER: No information is available here regarding the petition in question. But the Government of India have proposed certain measures which were sanctioned in May and July last respectively, namely:

1. Grant of certain supernumerary promotions in succession to officers specially retained on the active list since 1st January, 1916, in the rank of 1st grade commander and chief engineer.

2. Adoption of naval designations for officers of the executive and engineer branches of the Royal Indian Marine, including the grant of the rank and title of captain to officers hitherto designated 1st grade commanders.

Colonel YATE: Will the right hon. Gentleman call for petition in question?

Mr. FISHER: I will inquire.

EDUCATION.

8. Mr. KING asked whether Sir Sankaran Nair is now the Education Minister in the Viceroy's Council; if so, whether in his official capacity he is now inaugurating the reforms which he previously advocated; and what progress is being made with primary education in India?

Mr. FISHER: The answer to the first question is in the affirmative, and also to the second, with the qualification that the restrictions imposed on expenditure by the War have delayed progress in education, especially in primary education, greatly to the regret of the Government of India. The extension of primary education is closely connected with the political and administrative questions that are to be studied this winter by the Secretary of State and the Government of India.

Mr. KING: As the right hon. Gentleman is spending more in war time on education than in peace, will he not represent that the Government of India should do the same?

INDENTURED LABOURERS.

9. Mr. KING asked the Secretary of State for India whether he has official information that Indian labourers have gone to Canada to do agricultural work; if so, under what conditions were they recruited and transported; and whether the indentured system of coolie recruitment of labour has now entirely ceased?

Mr. FISHER: There is no such information. As already announced, the recruitment of indentured labour from India has been stopped and will not be revived.

SILVER CURRENCY.

10. Mr. STEWART asked the Secretary of State for India whether, in view of the fact that for some time the price of silver has been above the equivalent of 1s. 4d. to the rupee, the Indian Government has incurred any loss in supplying the necessary rupees for military operations in Mesopotamia and other places, and, if so, can he state the amount of the loss and how it will ultimately be met; whether the Indian Government has drawn on its reserve of rupees coined before the rise in silver, replacing them in India by a currency of notes of a low valuation; can he state the amount of the new issue of small notes; whether this form of currency is as acceptable to the native population as the metallic currency to which they have been so long accustomed; and whether the Indian Government is prepared to consider the advisability of joining in any movement to stabilise the price of silver and mitigate the constant oscillations and gambling in this currency medium?

Mr. FISHER: The purchases of silver above parity have been very recent. There is no reason to believe that rupees coined from such silver have gone to Mesopotamia. This being so, the second and third parts of the question do not arise. As the proposed notes for 2½ and 1 rupees have not yet been issued, the answer to the fourth part is in the negative; and the fifth and sixth parts cannot yet be answered. With regard to the last part, the Secretary of State would, of course, consider anything put before him from a responsible quarter.

Mr. STEWART: Will the right hon. Gentleman endeavour to persuade the Indian Government to modify the hostile attitude towards silver which they have adopted of late years?

Mr. FISHER: I was not aware that there was any hostile attitude.

FUTURE GOVERNMENT.

48. Sir W. BARTON asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the loyalty of our Indian fellow subjects as shown by their help in the War, he will take the opportunity of the visit of the Secretary of State for India to summon a representative conference of all the leaders of Indian thought to consider the future government of India?

The CHANCELLOR of the EX-CHEQUER (Mr. Bonar Law): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for India proposes while in India to hear, in company with the Viceroy, the views of those who are representative of Indian opinion. I do not think that it would be helpful, even if practicable, to proceed by means of a general conference.

FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES (COMMEMORATION).

49. Colonel BURN asked the Prime Minister if he intends to set aside 31st October as a day of national celebration and thanksgiving for the heroic defence made in the Ypres sector by the British Expeditionary Force, and by which the fate of Europe was saved?

Mr. BONAR LAW: The Government do not think it desirable to take the course suggested by my hon. and gallant Friend.

GERMANY (INTERNMENT OF BRITISH SUBJECTS).

50. Major HUNT asked the Prime Minister whether the skilled workmen who went from Woolwich to Krupps when Lord Haldane reduced the establishment at Woolwich are still in prison in Germany; and whether they were put in prison before war was declared and not even allowed to see their wives?

Mr. HOPE: If the hon. and gallant Member will supply me with the names of the workmen in question, I will make inquiry as to their present whereabouts.

General CROFT: May I ask if all British subjects in the German Empire are interned at the present time?

Mr. HOPE: No, I think that there are some exceptions.

LAND SETTLEMENT (SOLDIERS AND SAILORS).

51. Major HUNT asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the hundreds of thousands of sailors and soldiers who want to settle on the land of the United Kingdom after the War, and in view of the admitted urgency of the matter, he can

now say when the Government intend to buy the necessary land; and whether powers for compulsory purchase will be provided if these should be necessary?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I can add nothing to the answer given to my hon. Friend on the 18th.

ENEMY AIR RAIDS.

52. Mr. LYNCH asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the fact that London has been of late repeatedly and successfully raided by aeroplanes and by Zeppelins, the War Cabinet has ever had in consideration a plan calculated to deal effectually with such enemy attacks; whether any changes have been made in the personnel of the Services controlling London's air defence; and, if so, whether he will make a complete statement on the point?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I have nothing to add to the very full statements which have already been made to the House on this subject.

Mr. LYNCH: Might I ask how far the Government is prepared to defend incapacity? Is it realised that incapacity means defeat?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I think that is a difficult question to answer, but judging by my observation in this House, the hon. Member will be able to judge of it as well as myself.

Mr. HOGGE: Will the right hon. Gentleman say now when the Government will be ready to introduce their proposals with regard to the Air Ministry?

Mr. BONAR LAW: As I have said, I hope that this Bill will be introduced next week, but before it is introduced we desire that it should be carefully considered by the Army Council. As it happens, the Chief of the Staff is on the Continent, where he will be for most of this week, and that has caused the delay.

FOOD SUPPLIES.

COMPULSORY RATIONING.

53. Mr. LYNCH asked the Prime Minister whether, if the present shortage of breakfast-table necessaries corresponds to the conditions of supply of the country,

he will bring the matter to the attention of the War Cabinet, in order that a general scheme of rationing may be introduced without delay; and whether, if the supply of foodstuffs is such as to render that step inadvisable, he will announce radical changes in the office of the Food Controller, beginning with the head?

Mr. BONAR LAW: As regards the first part of the question, the Food Controller will not hesitate to recommend to the Cabinet a system of compulsory rationing should such a course become, in his opinion, necessary. The answer to the second part is in the negative.

Mr. LYNCH: May I ask if the right hon. Gentleman fully realises this question, and if any Members on the Front Bench are short of sugar, because honest men outside are?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I did not catch that observation.

FRESHWATER FISH.

69. **Mr. NOEL BUXTON** asked the President of the Board of Agriculture what steps are being taken to increase the supply of freshwater fish and eels, in pursuance of the recommendations of Lord Desborough's Committee?

The PRESIDENT of the BOARD of AGRICULTURE (Mr. Prothero): The Interim Report published by the Freshwater Fish Committee, to which I think my hon. Friend refers, does not contain any actual recommendations for increasing the supply of freshwater fish and eels. Such recommendations, it is understood, will be included in the further Report which the Committee propose to present in due course. In the meantime the Committee are continuing their investigations, which, it is understood, will include experiments in the culture and capture of eels.

Mr. BUXTON: Does the Government not think this source of food supply, which is so great a factor in other countries, is worth serious attention and vigorous action?

Mr. PROTHERO: I am certainly of that opinion.

POTATOES.

67. **Mr. KELLY** asked the President of the Board of Agriculture whether he is now in a position to issue detailed regulations regarding the guaranteeing of the

price of £6 a ton for potatoes; in view of the fact that that guarantee became operative on the 15th September and that some difficulties have arisen in securing that price in certain local markets?

Mr. PARKER (Lord of the Treasury): I have been asked to reply. I must refer the hon. Member to the answer given yesterday to the right hon. Member for West Islington by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. LOUGH (by Private Notice): I beg to ask the Leader of the House whether he is now in a position to state how it is proposed to give effect to the guarantee as to the price of potatoes since the 16th September, and whether farmers who have been compelled to sell at a lower price since that date, will receive compensation?

Mr. BONAR LAW: It is quite right that my right hon. Friend and the House should desire to receive such information as we can give before the subject is discussed; but I am not in a position to state how the matter is going to be dealt with, and, therefore, whatever is to be said about it must be said by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture. In answer to the last part of the question, it is certain that we will carry out the pledge which we have given. Therefore, if anyone chooses to sell below that price that has been fixed, I think that he is acting very foolishly.

Mr. WING: Will the amount that is stated in the Order interfere in any way with potatoes being sold at a lower price, and, if so, is the country supposed to make up the deficiency?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I have answered the last part of the question already. The reason for not allowing it to be sold at a lower price is that if this is done farmers may think that there will be a margin for which a market will not be obtained, and therefore they will think that they are being left and rush to sell. The Government will keep their pledge. Therefore, in my opinion, anyone who chooses to sell for a lower price is doing so at his own risk.

Mr. LOUGH: Will my right hon. Friend say how the case is to be dealt with, of the grower who has had to realise since the 15th September, where he cannot get the price that the Government guarantee?

Mr. BONAR LAW: It is obvious that this question must be dealt with by a more comprehensive statement than can be made in answer to questions. All I can say is that the Government do intend to keep their pledge, but, as I understood that pledge, it was that the price would be secured to the growers.

Mr. FARRELL: Are we to understand from the right hon. Gentleman that in Ireland the minimum price of £6 per ton is still to be enforced?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I have already said that the Food Controller is not prepared to state exactly in what way he proposes to meet this difficulty. That must be stated in discussion, and not in answer to questions.

Mr. FARRELL: Is not the fixing of a minimum price in Ireland simply feeding the dog on his own tail?

Mr. J. MASON: Do the Government realise that the real danger is that the more perishable kind of potatoes may rot?

Mr. BONAR LAW: The Government realise that thoroughly. We know that the result of what has been done has been to increase greatly the amount of food in the country, to the extent of 2,000,000 tons, and we are determined that that food shall not be wasted.

WHEAT COMMISSION.

73. **Mr. BOWERMAN** asked the President of the Board of Trade if he can state the financial results of the purchase and sale operations undertaken by the Wheat Commission?

Mr. PARKER: The financial results of the purchase and sale operations undertaken by the Wheat Commission have been recently reviewed by the Select Committee on National Expenditure, and I would refer the hon. Member to their first report.

IMPORTED MEAT.

78. **Mr. W. THORNE** asked the Secretary to the Board of Trade whether he is aware that his predecessor suggested that in the control of imported meat the workers' organisations should be represented upon Sir Thomas Robinson's advisory committee; and whether, if he endorses that suggestion, he will communicate with the various trade unions concerned, namely, the National Union of

Journeymen Butchers, the National Union of General Workers, and the Dock Labourers' Union of Liverpool?

Mr. WARDLE: I do not think my predecessor made such a suggestion, inasmuch as there is no advisory committee in connection with the control of imported meat. The Board of Trade, through Sir Thomas Robinson, occasionally consult their selling agents and market salesmen as to the state of the meat market, and if the unions mentioned will let me have any suggestions they may desire to make bearing on the matter, I shall be pleased to consider them.

COUNTY LONGFORD AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE.

83. **Mr. J. P. FARRELL** asked the Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture (Ireland) whether his attention has been called to the resolution passed by the County Longford Committee of Agriculture at their meeting of the 5th ultimo pointing out the inadequacy of the funds of the committee for their regular agricultural schemes and representing to the Department the necessity to provide adequate funds to prevent a break in or injury to the essential work of the agricultural development of the county; whether such funds for approved regular county schemes have yet been secured; and, if not, will he urgently press the matter on the proper authorities?

The **CHIEF SECRETARY** for IRELAND (**Mr. Duke**): The Department of Agriculture have received the resolution referred to. Additional funds to supplement Grants to county committees for the purposes of local schemes are not at present available. The matter is one to which the Department is giving attention.

Mr. FARRELL: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in consequence of these funds having been reduced a great number of important agricultural schemes for Ireland are practically unable to be put into operation?

Mr. DUKE: I cannot say that I am aware of any important schemes not having been put into operation.

WAR AIMS.

54. **Mr. TREVELYAN** asked the Prime Minister whether he is now prepared to make any further statement in regard to

whether the question of defining the war aims of the Allies, as desired by the Russian Government, will be undertaken by the coming Allied Conference?

Mr. BONAR LAW: There is no statement to be made at present with regard to the Conference on War Aims. As I have already indicated, the Conference that meets in the middle of November is concerned with the conduct of the War.

ALLIES' CONFERENCE (WAR MEASURES).

55. **Mr. R. MACDONALD** asked the Prime Minister whether any change has taken place as regards the purpose of the Conference of the Allies at Paris so that it is no longer accurate to describe it as a War Aims Conference; and whether the Russian Government has been informed of, and concurs in, the change?

Mr. BONAR LAW: The Conference has been called to consider the general situation in the War, and take measures for the further co-operation among the opponents of the Central Powers to bring it to a victorious conclusion. This has always been the object of this particular Conference.

Mr. TREVELYAN: Might I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he is aware that Mr. Kerensky, in that Proclamation to the Russian people reconstituting his Government after the Korniloff affair, said that "this Conference will discuss several questions connected with the common War of the Allies, and our representatives will seek to obtain an understanding on the basis of the principles of the Russian Revolution," and whether that does not mean a discussion of war aims?

Mr. BONAR LAW: My attention has not been called to that statement, but what I stated is correct. This Conference has been called for the special purpose of the conduct of the War. A subsequent Conference may very likely be held dealing with these other matters.

Mr. TREVELYAN: Do I understand from that that the Conference mentioned by the Minister for Blockade and by the Foreign Secretary in reply to questions by myself refers not to this Conference but to the next Conference which it is in contemplation to be held?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I really think it would be more useful to put questions of that kind to the Ministers to whom they may refer.

Mr. R. MACDONALD: Would the right hon. Gentleman help to clear up a misunderstanding by saying whether this Conference about which he has been answering is the same thing that has been advertised for a long time in the Press or whether it is something quite independent of that Conference?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I am afraid it is not so easy to clear it up. I do not know what has been advertised in the Press. I have clearly stated that this particular Conference is a Conference to consider the conduct of the War and was called for that purpose.

Mr. LEES SMITH: Does the right hon. Gentleman recollect that at the meeting at the Albert Hall, which he attended, the Prime Minister stated that this was to be a military and political Conference, and has there been any change in policy since that date?

Mr. BONAR LAW: Does the hon. Member really think that a political Conference is not necessarily also for the conduct of the War?

61. **Mr. LYNCH** asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether the authorities in charge of the air defences of London possess any gun capable of effectively shelling Zeppelins at the maximum height to which they can rise; and, if not, whether such a gun is available or in course of manufacture?

Mr. PETO: On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for hon. Members to put down questions so worded that they can only be calculated to injure this country, and give information to the enemy?

Mr. SPEAKER: That is a matter for each Member to reconcile with his own conscience.

Mr. LYNCH: May I reply to the point of Order by submitting that I consider the greatest injury that can be done to this country is the continued incapacity which this question is directed to remove?

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

FLAX CONTROL BOARD.

62. Mr. KELLY asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether, in view of the fact that representatives of the War Department, the Department of Aeronautical Supplies, the Admiralty, the Irish Department of Agriculture, the Scottish and Irish spinners, are all included in the Flax Control Board, but no representative of the Irish flax growers has been included, he will select such a representative and add his name as a member of the board?

Mr. FORSTER: Two representatives of the Irish Department of Agriculture are members of the Flax Control Board. It is not considered necessary—at all events at this stage—to add a direct representative of the Irish flax growers on the board.

Mr. HUGH LAW: Is it considered, then, that the flax-growers have less interest in the proper working of the Control Board than the spinners?

Mr. FORSTER: No, Sir; because the Board of Control regulates the matter after the flax is grown.

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE (SOLDIERS).

64. Captain BLAIR asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office the estimated cost to the public and the estimated percentage of saving in administration expenses if soldiers were relieved from paying their contribution to national health insurance; and if these considerations were taken into account recently while revising the soldiers' pay and allowances?

Mr. FORSTER: This point is now under consideration.

ARMAMENT ARTIFICERS.

65. Mr. CROOKS asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether, although it was customary for armament artificers to receive an increase of 1s. per day after three years' service, if recommended, it is now taking at least nine years for a man to get the advance, while some of the junior artificers will have to serve fifteen years before they will get it; whether a number of artificers have been acting as temporary warrant officers, in

some cases for eighteen months; and whether he will consider the question of increase in pay, the possibility of appointing to full rank those acting as temporary warrant officers, and the possibility of making artificers eligible for the post of inspector of ordnance machinery in view of their qualifications and the varied technical work they are capable of and called upon to do?

Mr. FORSTER: The increase of 1s. per diem in the pay of armament artificers has never been given automatically after three years' service, but is given only to a limited establishment of specially selected artificers who have had at least three years' service. In view of the slowness of promotion to the higher grade, the number of artificers who may receive the higher rate has been temporarily increased during the War. Temporary warrant officers receive pay as such and are given temporary warrants for the period of the War. It is regretted that it is not possible to give them permanent promotion except as vacancies arise. Further, since the outbreak of war, a new commissioned rank of assistant inspector of ordnance machinery has been created, which is filled by promotion from among armament artificers.

WAR LOANS.

STOCK EXCHANGE SERVICES.

57. Sir J. JARDINE asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any official acknowledgment has been made of the services rendered by the stockbrokers of London and other towns and cities in the United Kingdom in procuring subscriptions to the last War Loan and its predecessors?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I am well aware of the part played by the Stock Exchanges in this matter, and I am glad to have this opportunity of acknowledging publicly the great assistance which has been rendered by stockbrokers in all parts of the Kingdom in connection with War Loan subscriptions.

Mr. SNOWDEN: Can the right hon. Gentleman say how much money these stockbrokers have made out of these transactions?

Mr. BONAR LAW: No; but I am bound to say, from my experience in connection with the Loan, that that certainly was not the chief motive.

Apollonia King Street

Charles B. B. B. B.

W. W. W. W.

STEAMSHIP FREIGHTS.

59. **Mr. HOUSTON** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it was with his knowledge and approval that the Ministry of Shipping recently issued instructions to certain Conference Line steamship owners to increase their rates of freight by 50 per cent.?

Mr. BONAR LAW: The fixing of rates in ships requisitioned by the Government is left by the Cabinet to the Minister of Shipping. I am, of course, not consulted in regard to any particular rates.

Mr. HOUSTON: Now that my right hon. Friend is aware of this, does he approve of the action of the Shipping Controller?

Mr. BONAR LAW: It altogether depends upon the intention and the effect of it. I cannot judge without knowing the facts.

Mr. PRINGLE: Does not the right hon. Gentleman think that this is a matter for Treasury control, owing to the effect this has on prices, both as against the Government and as against the consumer in this country?

Mr. BONAR LAW: It is a matter, of course, for the decision of the Government of the country. If the idea in the question is that revenue is coming to the Treasury in consequence, well, I should not be sorry to see it, if other circumstances justified it; but it is not the case. The object is to ensure that the Government does not lose.

Mr. PRINGLE: But does not the Government lose, owing to the prices being forced up against them; because the prices depend upon the increased freights?

Mr. BONAR LAW: Does the hon. Member mean to imply that the Government ought to carry goods at less than cost in order to keep down prices?

Mr. PRINGLE: They are fixing prices.

Mr. HOUSTON: Will the right hon. Gentleman denounce the Shipping Controller as a profiteer and a gentleman making excessive profits, at any rate in the early part of the year?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I do not know what the hon. Member means. If he means that the Shipping Controller is making personal profits—

Mr. HOUSTON: No.

Mr. BONAR LAW: Then he ought to denounce the Government.

Mr. HOUSTON: Exactly!

Mr. BONAR LAW: I should be sorry to denounce the Government for making profits, but I am afraid they are not being made.

Mr. PRINGLE: Are not these profits made at the cost of the general taxpayers and, therefore, an indirect form of taxation?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I have already said that no profits are intended to be made. The object is to fix rates to cover the cost the Government incurs.

BASIC SLAG.

66. **Mr. PETO** asked the President of the Board of Agriculture whether basic slag is now unobtainable by agriculturists in this country and the whole of the unsold stock has been taken over by the Government to meet the requirements of agriculturists in Ireland; and, if so, whether he can state the reason of this action?

Mr. PROTHERO: The hon. Member has been misinformed. The makers of basic slag have, in the majority of cases, sold their output in advance to dealers and merchants, but the Board have no reason to suppose that farmers generally are unable to obtain supplies from their usual merchants. The production of slag is much larger this season than in previous years, and every effort is being made to increase the output still further. According to the Board's information, the quantity purchased by Irish merchants is not in excess of the supply to which that country is fairly entitled.

Mr. PETO: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that makers are now informing merchants that they have no stocks of basic slag and are not likely to have any to deliver before the end of February next?

Mr. PROTHERO: I am not aware of that, and I should very much doubt the truth of it; but if the hon. Member will give me the information, I will make inquiries.

Mr. MOONEY: Is it a fact that the Department has taken over the manufacture?

Mr. PROTHERO: The Department has not taken over the manufacture of basic slag.

Mr. MOONEY: Then the allegation in the question is untrue.

TRAWLING (START BAY REOPENING).

70. **Colonel BURN** asked the President of the Board of Agriculture if he will consider the reopening of Start Bay for trawlers now that the restriction imposed by the Admiralty at the beginning of the War is understood to be removed?

Mr. PROTHERO: The northern part of Start Bay will shortly be open to fishing vessels trawling under sail or motor power and authorised to fish by permits issued by the Board's district inspector for the locality. The permits will carry with them certain conditions, of which due notification will be given.

Colonel BURN: When may the opening of the bay be expected? Can the right hon. Gentleman give me any date?

Mr. PROTHERO: I believe the notice is actually going out now.

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL (COUNTY HALL BUILDING).

72. **Mr. GILBERT** asked the First Commissioner of Works for what Departments and for what purposes the new County Hall buildings and the new Sessions House at Newington Causeway are to be used?

The FIRST COMMISSIONER OF WORKS (Sir Alfred Mond): Certain portions of the London County Council new County Hall buildings are being prepared to provide additional accommodation for the Ministry of Food. The London Council new Sessions House, Newington Causeway, will shortly be occupied by the National Service Department Recruiting Section.

TRAVELLING PRIVILEGES (MINERS).

74. **Mr. HINDS** asked the President of the Board of Trade whether similar travelling privileges to those enjoyed by the Army Reserve munition workers can be extended to miners and similar workers

who do work of national importance, and who desire to travel to their homes each week; and, if so, must they enrol as war work volunteers in order to obtain this privilege?

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the MINISTRY of NATIONAL SERVICE (Mr. Beck): My right hon. Friend has asked me to reply. My hon. Friend appears to be misinformed as to the privileges enjoyed by Army Reserve munition workers. Neither they nor war work volunteers are granted free travelling facilities to visit their homes each week. They are, however, granted free travelling warrants to visit their homes upon certain recognised trade holidays, provided they were transferred to work away from their homes by the direction of the Minister of Munitions or the Minister of National Service, as the case may be. Miners and similar workers will, under the conditions governing the scheme, be eligible for enrolment as war work volunteers should the demand and occasion arise.

SYNTHETIC INDIGO.

77. **Sir J. D. REES** asked the Secretary to the Board of Trade whether German synthetic indigo is finding its way into the United Kingdom through Switzerland and as the manufacture of that country; and, if he has no information to this effect, whether he will seek such at the India Office, in view of the fact that among those engaged in the natural indigo trade in India, it is believed that such importation is being effected?

Mr. WARDLE: All synthetic indigo imported into this country from Switzerland is required to be accompanied by British consular certificates of non-enemy origin, and neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for India nor I have any information tending to show that German indigo is being imported from Switzerland. If the hon. Member has any evidence to that effect, I should be glad to receive it, in order that inquiry may be made.

MUNITIONS.

ACETYLENE GAS.

86. **Major LANE-FOX** asked the Minister of Munitions whether he is aware of the number of farmers whose only

means of lighting their premises is by acetylene gas, especially during the present scarcity of paraffin; and whether he can reconsider the stoppage of the sale of carbide by his Department?

Sir W. EVANS (Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Munitions): Owing to the shortage of supplies, it has been necessary to limit the use of calcium carbide almost entirely to industrial purposes connected with the manufacture of munitions of war and with shipbuilding. All applications for this material for illuminating purposes have for some time been refused. Various substitutes are available. I regret that farmers have had to suffer in common with other members of the community.

Mr. TENNANT: Will the right hon. Gentleman give information as to what possible substitute can be used in houses which are lit entirely by this method, and where there is no alternative?

Sir W. EVANS: I can only suggest oil lamps and candles.

Major LANE-FOX: Where oil is not available can the right hon. Gentleman suggest what can be used?

Sir W. EVANS: Candles, so far as they will go.

DEFENCE OF THE REALM ACT.

INTERNMENTS (ALFONSO PALCIC).

90. Mr. O'LEARY asked the Home Secretary whether, in view of the fact that it is not the policy of the Government 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, he will explain on what grounds the Croat-Slav Alfonso Palcic has been selected and interned because he did not give such proof of friendly dispositions; and whether he will cause an inquiry to be made into all the allegations, if any, against Palcic, the source of those allegations, and all the circumstances connected with his internment?

Sir G. CAVE: I cannot add anything to my three previous answers to the hon. Member on this subject.

Mr. O'LEARY: Does the right hon. Gentleman not see the necessity of holding an inquiry into the circumstances connected with the case?

Sir G. CAVE: I have already investigated it.

DEPORTATION (ABRAHAM BEZALEL).

91. Mr. KING asked on what conditions Abraham Bezalel, late secretary of the Foreign Jews' Protection Committee, was offered his release from internment; why he was deported without trial; to what country he has been deported; and whether the police authorities supplied the photograph of him in French uniform which appeared in the Press?

Sir G. CAVE: The hon. Member is mistaken in thinking that this man was interned. He was arrested with a view to deportation, and the deportation was postponed as an act of grace pending the consideration of an application by his representative for his release on an undertaking as to his future conduct. As he declined to give an undertaking which I could regard as sufficient, the deportation order was enforced, and he was placed on a ship leaving this country for Scandinavia, being in possession of a passport valid for a journey to his own country, Roumania. I have no information as to the last part of the question.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WITNESSES).

Mr. WHITEHOUSE asked whether in cases of persons interned under Regulation 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act the witnesses brought before the Advisory Committee are in any way pledged to secrecy?

Sir G. CAVE: The answer is in the negative, but it is always made clear to witnesses that the investigations conducted by this Committee are of a highly confidential character.

MINERAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE (OIL PRODUCTION).

92. Sir JOHN AINSWORTH asked whether the British Mineral Resources Committee, appointed to deal with the examination and development of such mineral properties, other than coal or iron ore, in the United Kingdom as are considered to be likely to be of special value for the purposes of the War, has yet reported, or whether they have expressed any opinion on the possible production of oil; and whether the Committee can proceed under the Defence of the Realm Act

[Sir J. Ainsworth.]

and the Acquisition of Land Act, with the consent of the Treasury, to make the necessary explorations?

Sir W. EVANS: I have been asked to answer this question. I assume that my hon. Friend refers to the expert Committee appointed to advise the Director of the Mineral Resources Development Branch of the Ministry of Munitions. This Committee has not yet reported. A separate Department of the Ministry deals with the home production of oil. The powers to make the necessary borings and explorations are dependent upon the passing of the Bill which is at present before the House.

Sir J. AINSWORTH: Can the hon. Gentleman inform us whether there is any reason why they should not proceed with investigations relating to oil under the existing law?

Sir W. EVANS: I am afraid we have not sufficient power under the existing law to do as the hon. Member suggests.

OIL SUPPLY (UNITED KINGDOM).

20. **Mr. DENMAN** asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies, whether, in view of the need for increased supplies of oil, progress has been and is being made under the powers already available to the Government in boring for petroleum in the United Kingdom?

The **CIVIL LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY** (Mr. Pretyman): It is not in the public interest to publish details; but such preliminary steps have been taken as were considered possible pending the passing of the Petroleum Production Bill.

Mr. DENMAN: Is the House to understand that the Government are not delaying matters while the Bill is in progress through the House?

Mr. PRETYMAN: I cannot go so far as to say that.

Mr. PRINGLE: Will the Government see that the proved resources of the country in shale oil are exploited thoroughly before any hare-brained schemes are undertaken?

Mr. PRETYMAN: We are trying to develop the resources of the country as far as we can, whether in liquid oil or in shale oil.

Mr. PRINGLE: Is not the Government taking more shale oil from the Scotch fields at the present time than ever before?

Mr. PRETYMAN: It is taking considerably more shale oil than before, but that is a mere drop in the ocean of our requirements.

Mr. DENMAN: Is it a fact that the Government are delaying the production of oil merely because they cannot pay royalties?

Mr. PRETYMAN: It is not the fact. It is not on the question of royalties at all. That is not the point. The point is that we have no authority to spend money on exploration of a speculative character for oil without the authority of the House.

Westminster Hall.

71. **Mr. KING** asked the First Commissioner of Works whether he can make a statement about the fleche recently erected on the roof of Westminster Hall; whether he is aware that architectural authorities consider the fleche ill-designed; will he say who designed this erection; and what was the cost?

Sir A. MOND: The question of what course should be taken when the removal of the fleche erected by Sir John Soane in 1821 was necessitated owing to the repairs to the roof of Westminster Hall was submitted by my predecessor to the Ancient Monuments Board for England. In accordance with this Board's decision, the present fleche was erected according to designs prepared in my Department. I know of no more competent architectural authority to advise on the treatment of ancient historical buildings. I am not aware that any competent architectural authority agrees with the statement made by the hon. Member. The cost was £3,200.

Mr. KING: Why cannot the name of this genius in architecture be given to us?

Sir A. MOND: I shall be pleased to give my hon. Friend, if he puts a question down, the names and composition of the Board, and he will find it includes some of the most eminent architects in this country.

WRITTEN ANSWERS.

WAR.

EXCESS PROFITS DUTY (PETROLEUM INTERESTS).

Mr. CURRIE asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether an owner of land who sells, not for a royalty but for a lump cash payment, his interests, such as they may be, in a quantity of petroleum under his land to an oil merchant or syndicate either at auction or by private treaty, will be required to pay Excess Profits Duty on the net profits arising out of such a trading operation in the same way and on the same scale as a shopkeeper or co-operative trading society selling oil by the gallon across the counter; and, if not, whether he will introduce legislation to place large and small sales on the same plane of taxation?

Mr. BONAR LAW: Excess Profits Duty is charged upon excess profits arising from a trade or business, and the question whether the proceeds of a given sale constitute the profits of a trade or business is one to be determined upon the particular facts of each case. Where the sale is an isolated transaction of a capital nature, the proceeds (whether small or large) could not ordinarily be regarded as profits of a business carried on by the vendor, and would not, therefore, be chargeable to Excess Profits Duty.

DEATH DUTIES (WAR LOAN).

Mr. CURRIE asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in view of the fact that $4\frac{1}{2}$ per Cent. War Loan does not carry the privilege of being accepted in payment of Death Duties, even when converted into 5 per Cent. Loan by executors, he has considered the advisability of accepting it for this purpose upon terms considered equitable by the Treasury?

Mr. BONAR LAW: As the terms of issue of the $4\frac{1}{2}$ per Cent. War Loan do not give it the privilege of being accepted in payment of Death Duties it would not be equitable to the general taxpayer for the Treasury to accept it at any higher price than could be obtained by a sale in the market. There would be no advantage

to a holder in tendering it at such price as compared with selling it and tendering cash.

INCOME TAX.

AVOIDANCE.

Mr. CURRIE asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has been informed of any action taken by the committees of the London or other stock exchanges in connection with the practice known as straddling with a view to avoiding payment of Income Tax; whether any inquiry has been made by the Inland Revenue Department with the object of ascertaining whether the practice defeats the revenue or merely effects redistribution of liability for tax between buyers and sellers; and, if so, with what result?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I have no special information on the subject. The Commissioners of Inland Revenue are considering whether the character and extent of the practice referred to are such as to call for any action to prevent the avoidance of Income Tax. I may point out to my hon. Friend that the danger of loss to the revenue is limited to the dividends of securities which are paid without deduction of Income Tax, and there is no reason to suppose that the revenue has hitherto suffered any loss from operations of this nature.

ARMY PENSIONS.

Major H. TERRELL asked the Secretary to the Treasury whether the pensions granted to the widows of officers and men killed in the War are liable to Income Tax; and, if so, will the Government take steps to relieve such widows from such liability on the ground that they have already made more than their share of sacrifice in the War?

Mr. BALDWIN: These pensions are and always have been income taxable under the provisions of the Income Tax Acts. Whether they are in fact charged with duty depends upon the amount of the total income from all sources. The widow whose total income is within the exemption limit pays no tax, and where the income exceeds that limit the various statutory abatements are allowed. The considerations suggested in the second part of the question, however appropriate to the determination of the amount of the pension, are hardly relevant to the question of liability to Income Tax.

FOOD SUPPLIES.

BUTCHERS (REGISTRATION).

Mr. W. THORNE asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food, whether he will issue a Regulation compelling all salesmen who sell Government imported Australasian meat to retail butchers to preserve the address of the purchaser and on the same day as the sale to forward particulars to the local food control committee so as to enable them to exercise proper supervision and stop the robbery of the public which is at present existing?

Mr. PARKER: It is proposed at an early date to issue an Order providing for the registration of all wholesale and retail butchers. The system of registration proposed will be such as to secure an adequate supervision of the sale of both imported and home-killed meat, and to prevent such practices as those to which the hon. Member alludes. Meanwhile, the suggestion made in the question will receive the careful consideration of the Food-Controller.

FOXHOUNDS (OATMEAL).

Mr. W. THORNE asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether he is aware of the amount of oatmeal consumed in feeding foxhounds, and that in consequence the price is raised when required for purposes of human food; and whether he will issue notices to the country police to keep watch and prevent waste of this description from arising in future?

Mr. PARKER: The feeding of hounds with oatmeal is not forbidden by Statutory Order, but the Master of Foxhounds' Association have voluntarily agreed not to purchase further supplies of oatmeal for this purpose during the period of the War. In view of this undertaking, no further action is considered necessary.

FOXES (DEPREDACTIONS).

Mr. W. THORNE asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether he is aware that the examination of the poultry funds of 160 fox hunts over the last five years reveals an average expenditure of £250 per annum per establishment in compensation for destroyed poultry; that at 2s. per fowl this implies an annual destruction of 400,000 head of poultry; that it is computed on the average

what is paid for is only a percentage of the total destruction; that foxes have increased enormously during the last two years; and whether his Department is now prepared to adopt the suggestion made to them last February and put a reward of £1 per head on every fox destroyed?

Mr. PARKER: I have not been able to check the figures given in the first part of the question, but I understand that the destruction of poultry by foxes has considerably decreased since the outbreak of war. I cannot agree with my hon. Friend's assertion that foxes have increased enormously during the last two years. My information is that their number has been so considerably reduced that it is unnecessary to adopt the suggestion made in the last part of the question.

BARLEY.

Mr. BENTHAM asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether he is aware that, owing to brewers being able to give 5s. 3d. per quarter more for barley than millers, they are always able to secure the best quality, leaving inferior goods for bread; and that they frequently completely clear the markets, so that millers requiring barley for bread have to go without any; and whether he will take steps at once to abolish the 5s. 3d. preference now given to brewers over millers?

Mr. PARKER: The object of permitting maltsters to pay to farmers 5s. 3d. per quarter more than millers was to allow farmers to obtain extra prices for the types of barley known as malting barley. These types are not those best adapted for milling. Owing to the limitation of brewing, less than half the crop of barley will be allowed to be used for malting, and it is expected that as soon as threshing becomes more general any difficulty experienced by millers in obtaining an adequate supply of barley at the authorised price will disappear without any necessity for further action.

MILK.

Mr. BYRNE asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether the Ministry of Food have contracted for what is considered to be an adequate supply of dried milk, which they can supply to medical officers of health and to institutions that will need dried milk during the winter; if he is aware that the

total amount of full-cream dried milk that may be available equals approximately 2,200 tons and would represent nearly 4,000,000 gallons of whole milk when reconstituted; if it will be suitable for infant feeding; will he say whether Ireland will participate in the scheme; and if any arrangements are being made to safeguard a supply of milk for the Irish people?

Mr. PARKER: The answer to the first three parts of the question is in the affirmative. Irish children will participate in the scheme for the distribution of dried milk. Arrangements for safeguarding an adequate supply of liquid milk for Ireland are also under consideration.

MEAT.

Mr. FIELD asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether he is aware that pork is on sale practically all the year, but in larger quantity at this season and up to March; and, seeing that in consequence of the omission of pork rates from the Schedule of meat prices the average works out lower than it really is, whether he will arrange to have pork included in the price of food commodities?

Mr. PARKER: The hon. Member is under a misapprehension. Maximum wholesale prices for pork, both home-killed and imported, are included in the Schedule of the Meat (Maximum Prices) Order, 1917, which came into operation on 3rd September last.

DISTRIBUTION.

Mr. ANDERSON asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether his attention has been drawn to the increasing difficulties in obtaining supplies of such commodities as margarine, butter, bacon, sugar, and tea; whether he has been informed of the shortage of milk in some districts of Manchester, and that the appearance of a small quantity of butter on the Preston market last Saturday led to a struggle requiring the intervention of the police, that potato queues are again being witnessed in a number of London districts, and that fresh eggs are being sold in some districts for as much as 6d. and 7d. each; and whether, in view of the danger of serious food shortage aggravated by winter conditions, he will take steps to organise the distribution of

available food supplies on a family basis, making it impossible for any interest to use this emergency for its own profit?

Mr. PARKER: It is hoped that the action of the Department will effectually prevent any section of the community from making use of any temporary shortage for its own profit. The Food Controller has already taken steps to organise the distribution of sugar on a family basis, and the organisation so set up will be available for the distribution of other essential foodstuffs if occasion should arise.

WHEAT.

Mr. NEVILLE asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether, in view of the statement that immense quantities of wheat in Australian warehouses are deteriorating owing to delays in procuring tonnage and milling facilities so as to cause heavy losses of foodstuffs and of British taxpayers' money, he will consider some arrangement whereby British farmers, whose capital is locked up in wheat stacks, may be induced to postpone thrashing until their wheat is actually required for milling?

Mr. PARKER: The increasing scale of maximum prices permitted for late deliveries of wheat under the Grain (Prices) Order already offers an inducement to farmers to keep their wheat in stack.

POTATOES.

Mr. KELLY asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether he is now in a position to issue detailed Regulations regarding the guaranteeing of the price of £6 a ton for potatoes, in view of the fact that that guarantee became operative on 15th September, and that some difficulties have arisen in securing that price in certain local markets?

Mr. PARKER: I can add nothing to the answer given yesterday to the right hon. Member for West Islington by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

SUGAR.

Mr. NIELD asked whether the small local grocer will be placed on the same footing as the large firms as regards not only the quantity but the quality of sugar supplied under the card system?

Mr. PARKER: The sugar distribution scheme will, it is hoped, preclude any possibility of discrimination between the two classes of retailers referred to in the question. Steps will, moreover, be taken to remedy any inequality which may arise in the distribution of the several qualities of sugar.

POULTRY FOOD.

Mr. GRANT asked the President of the Board of Agriculture (1) if steps can be taken to regulate the price of foodstuffs, such as damaged wheat, for the feeding of poultry; and if he is aware that the present cost of such foodstuffs is compelling thousands of poultry keepers to sell off their stock; and (2) if he will take action to encourage poultry keepers in the direction of an increase of the importation of feeding stuffs for poultry rather than the importation of eggs; and if he is aware that such suggestion, if adopted, would lead to a saving of tonnage?

Mr. PARKER: I have been asked to reply to this and the following question, and I will answer them together. The prices of damaged home-grown grain are already regulated by the Grain (Prices) Order, and it is proposed to issue an Order regulating the prices of imported damaged grain and of poultry mixtures. The Food Controller is anxious to encourage poultry-keepers so far as the restriction of imports permits; but in view of the difficulty of obtaining an adequate supply of cereals for human food it is impossible to increase the importation of feeding stuffs for poultry. The importation of eggs has considerably decreased during the last two years.

AGRICULTURAL MOTORS.

General Sir IVOR PHILIPPS asked the President of the Board of Agriculture what number of Ford agricultural motors are under order; how many have been delivered and when the balance is expected to be delivered; and whether any and, if so, how many of these tractors are to be made available for sale to farmers, and at what price?

Mr. PROTHERO: The total number of Ford tractors ordered by the Government is 6,000. None have yet been delivered, but a large number have been completed in America and are due to arrive shortly. It is anticipated that the whole number will be available in time for the spring ploughing. Under present arrangements

these tractors will be allocated to the county Agricultural Executive Committees for use under their control, and they will not be available for sale to individual farmers.

COMPENSATION CLAIM, DUBLIN.

Mr. BYRNE asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland if he will state the result of his inquiries into the claim for compensation by Mr. E. O'Neill, Eden Quay, Dublin?

Mr. DUKE: The inquiries are not yet complete.

GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY, IRELAND.

Mr. KELLY asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether he is aware that passengers from the Londonderry, Strabane, and Dungannon direction holding third-class tickets on the Great Northern Railway are prevented from travelling third-class on the evening mail train from Belfast to Dublin, although Belfast passengers and passengers from the Enniskillen and Dundalk line are allowed to travel third-class on this train, and that there is a military policeman at Portadown to prevent passengers from the districts named from boarding the train; and, if so, will he state under what statute or regulations the company discriminate between passengers holding the same description of ticket?

Mr. DUKE: The Irish Railway Executive Committee inform me that there are two evening express services from Belfast to Dublin with expresses from Londonderry connecting at Portadown as follows:

	p. m.	p. m.
Derry	dep. 4. 0	5. 0
Belfast	dep. 5.30	6.40
Dublin	arr. 8. 0	9.30

The first is the Limited Mail, which carries a large number of cross-Channel passengers and mails, and is tightly timed. No third-class passengers are allowed to travel by it except such as would not be conveniently served by the second express. These are soldiers ordered to travel via the mail from Kingstown; cross-Channel passengers from any point holding third-class through tickets via Kingstown; and third-class passengers from the Enniskillen line who would have to wait one

and a half hours at Dundalk if they were compelled to wait for the second express. It is not practicable to extend third-class travel on the Limited Mail train, as it is a very difficult train to work to time.

NORWEGIAN CONVOY LOSS.

Mr. R. GWYNNE asked the First Lord of the Admiralty whether the officer responsible for the inadequate convoy and consequent loss of transports which occurred recently has been called upon to furnish a report; whether such report has been received; and whether, with a view to the satisfaction of public feeling, some information can be given to the House to account for the incident without waiting for a committee of inquiry to be set up?

Dr. MACNAMARA: My right hon. Friend the First Lord hopes to deal fully with this incident in the course of his statement to the House to-morrow.

MILITARY SERVICE.

WELSH-SPEAKING SOLDIERS.

Mr. ELLIS DAVIES asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether, in view of the need for Welsh-speaking labour in Wales, he can arrange that all Welsh-speaking soldiers intended for agricultural work shall be sent to the Agricultural Company at Wrexham so as to be available for farm work in Wales?

Mr. MACPHERSON: As far as possible all soldiers for agricultural work are sent to the county in which they worked as civilians.

UNDER-AGE SOLDIER.

Mr. BYRNE asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he will order the discharge of the boy, Private James Walsh, who is only seventeen years old, and now serving in the 86th Training Reserve Battalion?

Mr. MACPHERSON: Soldiers who have enlisted in the Army by overstating their age, as Walsh has done, are not discharged, if, at the time their correct age is communicated, they have attained seventeen years of age. They are retained on Home service until attaining the age of nineteen. Walsh appears to be seven-

teen and a half, and instructions have been issued in the sense which I have indicated.

COURTS-MARTIAL (DEFENCE OF ACCUSED).

Major DAVID DAVIES asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether there exists any provision of officers with legal training or knowledge attached to corps or Army headquarters who are responsible for the duty of defending officers or men charged with offences before courts-martial; and whether, in view of the Government's decision to provide expert legal aid on behalf of the officers concerned in the Mesopotamia Inquiry, he will take steps to have that provision extended to all ranks in the Army?

Mr. MACPHERSON: It is not the duty of any officer to defend an officer or man charged with an offence before a court-martial. The right of an accused to be represented by counsel or an officer having the same rights as counsel at general or district courts-martial are laid down in Rules of Procedure 87-94. At field-general courts-martial an accused has no right of representation, but in practice this is generally accorded whenever possible. If an accused charged with a grave offence before any court-martial desires to be represented and finds a difficulty in securing an officer for the purpose, on application by the accused, endeavours would be made to secure a suitable officer.

ROYAL GARRISON ARTILLERY (GUNNER FITZGERALD).

Mr. CLANCY asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that Gunner J. Fitzgerald, Royal Garrison Artillery, enlisted in Dublin as a smith in August, 1914, under Army form for tradesmen, and that though his contract of service has expired he has been refused his discharge from the Army; and will he say why this has been done, seeing that having been resident in Ireland he does not come under the Military Service Act?

Mr. MACPHERSON: I have no information as to this case, but if my hon. Friend will give me Fitzgerald's regimental number, I will have inquiries made.

WAR DEPARTMENT (DAMAGED
MOTOR-CARS).

Mr. FARRELL asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that a motor-car, the property of Mrs. M. J. Pearse of Main Street, Longford, was requisitioned by Major L. James, officer commanding 1st King Edward's Horse, stationed at Longford, in the month of May, 1916, under the authority of the Defence of the Realm Acts for use by the military authorities in Longford; that this motor-car, whilst being driven by a soldier of King Edward's Horse, under the authority of the said Major James, drove into and collided with a horse-drawn van and sustained injuries to the amount of £16 19s. 10d.; and that application for payment of this sum was made by the owner of the car, Mrs. Pearse; why payment has been withheld so long; and whether payment will now be made?

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

MESS FUNDS.

Major HENRY TERRELL asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether he has been able to discover any authority entitling the War Office on the disbandment of a battalion to confiscate that part of the officers' and sergeants' mess funds which were the private property of the officers and sergeants; and, if so, what is the authority?

Mr. FORSTER: I am afraid I can at present add nothing to the answer which I gave on 9th November last. In the further consideration of the question of these funds generally, the point referred to by my hon. and learned Friend will not be overlooked.

FISCALS (SCOTLAND).

Mr. WATT asked the Secretary for Scotland whether it is his intention to fill up the vacancy in a procurator fiscalship at present existing in Scotland or to adopt his former system of joining up two or three districts of this office, in view of the facts that very few duties have to be performed in war time by fiscals in most districts, that the holders of such offices are themselves in favour of consolidation, and that thereby considerable sums would be saved to the Treasury?

Mr. MUNRO: The appointment referred to falls to be made by the Lord Advocate, who has asked me to reply on his behalf. The answer to the first alternative of my hon. and learned Friend's question is in the affirmative; to the second in the negative. The Lord Advocate does not agree that very few duties have to be performed by fiscals in most districts in war time, and certainly no such state of affairs obtains with regard to the fiscalship in question. In view of the circumstances of this particular post, the Lord Advocate is satisfied that no amalgamation with any other district would be expedient or would result in any considerable saving to the Treasury.

ENLISTED POSTAL SERVANTS
(GRATUITIES).

General CROFT asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether, under Army Order 406/1915 and 42/1914 (Article 1,117, Pay Warrant), officers and non-commissioned officers and men of the Royal Engineers signals and postal service, Royal Flying Corps, who are postal servants in civil life, will not receive gratuities on their discharge; and, if so, whether this order applies to those who enlisted prior to these War Office decisions?

Mr. FORSTER: Gratuities will not be issued. These officers and men draw their full civil pay as well as their Army pay. If the gratuities were issued, their civil pay would be reduced *pro tanto*.

NAVAL AND MILITARY PENSIONS
AND GRANTS.

Mr. R. McNEILL asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if he is aware that Gunner F. W. Lentz, No. 13445, Royal Garrison Artillery, was discharged on the 10th of July, 1917, after twenty-two years' service in the Army, having been for thirteen months on active service with the 32nd Siege Battery in France; why no pension has yet been paid to this veteran; what pension he is entitled to receive; and if he will give directions for such pension, with arrears due from the date of his discharge, to be paid to Lentz without further delay?

Mr. FORSTER: Inquiry is being made, and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as I am in a position to do so.

CURRAGH CAMP (INJURED CANTEEN EMPLOYEE).

Mr. CLANCY asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether he is aware that on the 16th November last a man named Thomas Moran, in canteen employment at Curragh Camp, was waylaid by a soldier named Leonard James, of the Dorsetshire Yeomanry, and had his leg broken in the encounter; that Moran was twenty-one weeks under treatment for the injury and is still unable to do any but the lightest work; that though James was prosecuted at the Kildare Assizes and, having pleaded guilty to a common assault, was let out under the First Offender's Act, the injured man has been refused any compensation; and whether, in view of the fact that he was the main support of his father and mother, the War Office will now direct that he shall be adequately compensated?

Mr. FORSTER: On the facts as stated in the question, it is not possible to say whether any compensation should be paid from public funds; but if the hon. Member will send me further particulars of the occurrence, the matter will be further considered.

VOLUNTARY HOSPITALS (GRANTS- IN-AID).

Sir WILLIAM COLLINS asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether, in view of the increases in price of food, fuel, drugs, etc., since the amount of the Grants-in-Aid to voluntary hospitals in respect of the treatment of wounded soldiers was fixed, it is proposed to raise the scale of such Grants to these institutions?

Mr. FORSTER: Yes, Sir; this point has been under consideration for some time, and an announcement will shortly be made.

MUNITIONS.

PIG IRON.

Major TERRELL asked the Minister of Munitions whether a manufacturer of pig iron whose works are in Northamptonshire, but who manufactures pig iron by the methods and of the materials used by manufacturers of pig iron in Derbyshire and of the quality produced in Derbyshire, is entitled, under the Order dated 7th

July, 1916, under Regulation 30 A of the Defence of the Realm (Consolidation) Regulations, to charge the rates fixed for Derbyshire pig iron or those fixed for Northamptonshire pig iron?

Sir W. EVANS: The manufacturer referred to in my hon. Friend's question will only be entitled to charge the rates fixed for the Northamptonshire district.

INTERNMENTS (ADVISORY COM- MITTEE WITNESSES).

Mr. SNOWDEN asked the Home Secretary in what way it would assist the enemy's system of espionage to reveal to the accused the identity of witnesses called against him before the Advisory Committee, in view of the fact that if the person has any hostile connection he will be subsequently interned?

Sir G. CAVE: An interned person receives visits and writes letters, and there is always a possibility of his making use of information which has come to his knowledge

LICENSED TRADE (COMPENSA- TION).

Major DAVID DAVIES asked the Home Secretary whether he will give a Return of the levies made by the compensation authorities in England and Wales during the years 1916 and 1917 under Section 21 and Schedule 3 of the Licensing (Consolidation) Act, 1910?

Sir G. CAVE: Information on this point is given each year in Table II. (c) of the Licensing Statistics. The volume for 1916 will, I hope, be issued very shortly. I do not think that I should be justified at the present time in calling for a special Return of the figures for 1917.

PEACE PROPAGANDA.

Major HUNT asked the Home Secretary whether, in view of the fact that the agents of our enemies in this country are actively engaged in spreading discontent and urging people to agitate for an inconclusive peace, he can say what steps he is taking to prevent the circulation of seditious literature and for prosecuting people who agitate against the strenuous prosecution of the War?

Sir G. CAVE: This matter is receiving constant attention, and a number of seditious publications have been seized; but I do not think it would be to the public advantage that I should make any more detailed statement as to the action which has been or may be taken.

INDIAN ARMY (CONVALESCENT OFFICERS).

Major DAVIES asked the Secretary of State for India (1) whether wounded officers reported medically unfit for duty are liable, after nine months' convalescence, to be placed on unemployed pay, which is in many cases less than the pension to which they are entitled on retirement; and whether he will take steps to secure that these men shall not be deprived of an adequate recompense for their services; and (2) whether, according to the new Regulations of pay and allowances to wounded Indian Army officers while convalescing, the dates are so fixed as to exclude the men who served in the early days of the expeditions in Mesopotamia and East Africa; and whether he will make the Regulations retrospective in such a way as to include all officers who have seen service in this War, and who will otherwise have their pay reduced by one-half.

Mr. HERBERT FISHER: With the permission of the hon. and gallant Member, I will answer his two questions together. Under Rules issued in August last Indian Army officers still on the cadre of a regiment or Department who are wounded, or are on sick leave from field service, receive after nine months ordinary leave pay, not unemployed pay. Leave pay is generally considerably in excess of the amount of pension admissible on retirement and seldom, if ever, less. The new Rules apply to officers who were on leave on or after 17th February, 1917. They were agreed to by the India Office and the War Office after prolonged consideration, and I do not think that the latter Department or the Treasury would accept any further modification.

EJECTMENT ORDERS.

Colonel FRED HALL asked the President of the Local Government Board whether the wife of a soldier not paying

rent, living in the same cottage as the soldier did previous to enlistment and on the same conditions regarding rent, can, providing she is living respectably, be evicted from her home without a magistrate's order; and, if so, whether he will take steps to amend the laws in order that soldiers' wives may not be deprived of their homes without the consent of a magistrate?

Mr. HAYES FISHER: So far as I am aware, no order for ejectment can be issued at the present time without an application to a Court of law.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY COMMITTEE (REPORT).

Mr. C. DUNCAN asked the President of the Board of Trade whether the Committee on Electricity Supply has yet presented any Report; and, if so, when such Report will be published?

Mr. WARDLE: The Committee have not yet presented a Report, and they cannot say at present when they will be in a position to do so; but there will be no avoidable delay, in view of the great importance of the subject.

PRIVATE MOTOR CARS.

Sir JAMES DUNCAN asked the President of the Board of Trade if it is intended that no private cars are to be on the roads after the 31st October; and, if so, if all motor licences for private cars will be suspended from that date; if not, will he define the purposes for which private cars may be used: whether they may be used for business and station purposes, for attendance at meetings of local authorities or visiting committees of asylums or prisons, for attendance at church or public meetings, and for collection or dispatch of household necessities in country districts?

Sir A. STANLEY: It is not intended to prevent entirely the use of private motor cars consuming motor spirit, but to limit the purposes for which they may be used. An Order has been issued and will come into force on the 1st November, under which private motor cars can be used for business purposes, public duties, journeys to and from a railway station, and necessary household affairs, provided that no

other means of conveyance is reasonably available, and I am sending a copy of the Order to the hon. Member.

SHIPBUILDING (NEUTRALS' ORDERS).

Sir OWEN PHILIPPS asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Shipping Controller whether his attention has been drawn to the fact that neutral shipowners are reported to have recently placed orders with British shipbuilders for over seventy large cargo steamers; what steps the Shipping Controller proposes to take to enforce the British Ships Transfer Restrictions Act, 1915, which prohibits the transfer of any British vessels to foreigners during the War or within three years after the termination of the War; and whether, to avoid this Act of Parliament being circumvented, he will take steps to prohibit any of the vessels referred to being registered in the name of British limited liability companies unless he is satisfied that the steamers are *bonâ fide* the property of such companies, and that the companies are owned by British subjects of British parentage, and are not directly or indirectly controlled on behalf of persons who are not such British subjects?

Major NEWMAN asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Shipping Controller whether the Shipping Controller has been consulted and sanctioned the placing of contracts for eighty Norwegian vessels with firms in this country, a sum of £2,500,000 being received by the builders on the signing of the contract; will he give the names of the builders; and has he considered the necessity of making all shipyards available for the construction of British or Empire tonnage rather than for the tonnage of neutrals immediately after the conclusion of hostilities?

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: The shipping Controller is aware that, as stated in the question, orders have been placed—of late in considerable numbers—for the construction of merchant ships in British yards for neutral and other private owners. In the present state of the law these orders cannot be executed during the period of the War without the permission of the Government, and I need hardly say that, in view of pressing war requirements, it is not intended that such permission should

be given. The matter is therefore essentially a *post-bellum* question and has been carefully considered from this point of view. It is clear that some form of control over the output of British yards must continue to be exercised after the termination of hostilities. The principle upon which it will be exercised will necessarily depend upon the circumstances prevailing at the time, so that on this point I am not in a position to make any statement. The form in which the necessary powers should be obtained is now engaging the attention of the legal advisers of the Departments concerned, but I am assured that for the time being the position is fully safeguarded by legislation already in force.

SHIPPING FREIGHTS.

Mr. LOUGH asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Shipping Controller whether the freight on tea from Calcutta to London which, under a contract existing with the shipping companies, had been about 50s. per ton has been raised by authority of the Ministry of Shipping from October 1st to 270s.—300s.; who will receive this increment of freight; and whether it is the policy of the Ministry to impose these heavy additional burdens on foodstuffs?

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: The facts are not precisely stated in my right hon. Friend's question, the freight on tea from Calcutta to London under the old contract which has now expired being 75s. and not 50s. per freight ton of 50 cubic feet. The present commercial rate on tea is accurately stated in the question. It is very little above the actual cost of carrying the tea, the increment being less than one-fifth of a penny per pound. As soon as the trade is completely controlled, tea will enjoy the advantage of freight on a cost basis. I may add that, with regard to the conditions which previously obtained, the freight on Colombo tea has amounted since December 1st, 1916, to nearly 3d. per pound of tea carried, and this rate undoubtedly had its full effect upon the market and the consumer.

PRISONERS OF WAR (EXCHANGE).

Mr. PETO asked the hon. Member for Sheffield (Central Division), as representing the Prisoners of War Department at the Foreign Office, whether any progress

has been made in the arrangements for the exchange of prisoners of war of over forty-five years of age; and whether, with regard to the officers of the Merchant Service interned at Ruhleben since the commencement of the War, there is any probability of the exchange being effected before the coming winter?

Mr. J. HOPE: With regard to the first part of the question, I would refer to the reply given to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Southampton on Monday last. A number of the prisoners over forty-five to whom my hon. Friend refers are expected to be among the first to benefit. I trust that officers of the Merchant Service who come within the terms of our agreements with the German Government will be repatriated or transferred to Holland at an early date.

Civil Service Writers.

Mr. CROOKS asked the Secretary to the Treasury whether, having regard to the fact that Civil Service writers appointed as such before 19th August, 1871, were allowed to count the whole of their unestablished service for pension, whereas writers appointed after that date count only half of their unestablished service, and, having regard also to the fact that the Report of the Royal Commission on Superannuation in November, 1902, attached great weight to the principle of similarity of treatment of all classes of pensionable servants, he can now see his way to allow the full unestablished service to count in respect of all writers borne on the establishment throughout the Civil Service?

Mr. BALDWIN: For the explanation of the circumstances in which writers appointed since the 19th August, 1871, were permitted to reckon one-half of their temporary service towards superannuation under Section 3 of the Superannuation Act, 1887, I may refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by one of my predecessors on the 26th March, 1906, of which I am sending him a copy. The writers serving before 1871, to whom the special privilege of reckoning the whole of their temporary service under certain conditions was granted by Treasury Minute of the 1st June, 1882, constituted a class serving under conditions dissimilar to those prescribed for later appointees.

Land Purchase, Ireland.

Mr. FARRELL asked the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland if he will state the present position of the negotiations for the sale and division of the lands of Bann, Moydow, county Longford; how many persons have applied to the Estates Commissioners for a portion of these lands which are at present seized under the Defence of the Realm Act by the Department of Agriculture in Ireland; whether he is aware that the landlord, H. B. Armstrong, has sold all his other lands and retains this for grazing purposes only; whether the mansion on the lands is in ruins and unoccupied; whether the persons now applying would be all tillers of the soil and would produce valuable food stuffs if admitted to till these lands; and whether he will advise the Commissioners to strive to obtain possession of these lands immediately with a view to their division and allotment for the coming spring?

Mr. DUKE: There has been no change in the position of the proceedings pending before the Estates Commissioners for the sale of the estate referred to since I answered a previous question by the hon. Member on the 5th July. The lands in the occupation of Mr. H. B. Armstrong, at Bawn, county Longford have not been entered on by the Department of Agriculture. The lands in the townland of Bawn, on which they have entered, are those of Mr. Charles Webb, and they inform me that an opportunity of making good the default in the cultivation of these lands is being afforded Mr. Webb before further action is taken.

Mr. COSGRAVE asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether the Congested Districts Board have come to an agreement with Messrs. Horseman and Williams with a view to compensating them for their interest in their holdings at Meelick, county Galway, which they hold as planters; and, if not, whether the Board have served notice on those tenants that they will resume possession of the farms referred to which are required for the relief of congestion in the district.

Mr. DUKE: Proceedings have been instituted to obtain possession of portion of Mr. Williams' farm for the relief of congestion, but no agreement has been arrived at with him up to the present. The Congested Districts Board have not come to any agreement with Mr.

Horseman for his interest in the holding at Meelick, nor have they yet taken proceedings for the resumption of the holding.

Mr. COSGRAVE asked whether the Congested Districts Board have come to an agreement with Mr. John A. O'Kelly, Gurtray, Portumna, county Galway, as to compensating him for the interest in his holding at Capira, in the parish of Leckmolasserf, and which he holds from the Board as grazing tenant; and, if not, have the Board taken steps to resume possession of this farm for the relief of congestion in the district?

Mr. DUKE: The Congested Districts Board inform me that they have not come to an agreement with Mr. O'Kelly with reference to his farm at Capira on the Clanricarde Estate. As it appears that the adjacent holders have taken the grazing of the lands from Mr. O'Kelly, the Board do not propose to take any further action at present with a view to obtaining possession of the farm which is held under a yearly and not a judicial tenancy.

Mr. COSGRAVE asked whether the Congested Districts Board have come to an agreement with Messrs. Cooke and Blehien and Miss Hession with a view to compensating them for the interest in the grazing farms which they hold from the Board in the parish of Clontuskert, county of Galway; and, if not, whether the Board have served notice on those tenants that they will resume possession of the lands referred to which are required for the relief of congestion in the district?

Mr. DUKE: Negotiations are in progress for the purchase of the tenancy interests in the holdings of Miss Hession and Mr. Cooke. As regards Mr. Blehien's farm, the Congested Districts Board decided some time ago to take resumption proceedings with the object of obtaining possession of the lands for relief of congestion, but owing to the action of persons who drove live stock off the farm, the Board directed that no further action should be taken pending further orders. The prevalence of intimidation in any form has the effect of delaying indefinitely, instead of hastening, proceedings for the acquisition of any land in respect of which illegal practices prevail.

Mr. COSGRAVE asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether it is the inten-

tion of the Congested Districts Board to sell to Mr. James Howard his interest in a grazing farm which he holds from the Board at Moorefield, county Galway, containing 165 acres; if he is aware that Mr. Howard resides on a farm of 161 acres which adjoins the farm above mentioned, and which he has purchased under the Ashbourne Act; and if he will state what authority the Board have to sell land in a congested district to a man already in possession of 161 acres, while seven tenants, whose total valuation is only £73 10s., and who are tenants to the Board in the townland of Moorefield, are to be thus debarred from much-needed enlargements to their small holdings?

Mr. DUKE: The Congested Districts Board have entered into an agreement to sell to Mr. J. Howard the portion of the lands of Moorefield on the Clanricarde Estate referred to in the question. He has surrendered to the Board the lands of Ballyhanry and Aughrim Hill, containing 227 acres, for the relief of congestion.

Allotments (Ireland).

Mr. FIELD asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether his attention has been directed to the eviction of allotment holders at Mill Heap; and whether he will introduce an Allotments Bill for Ireland which will prevent the summary disturbance of allotment holders in Ireland until land is provided which, by the transference of their labour, will enable a continuance of the food supply?

Mr. DUKE: I have not seen any report as to the allotments at Mill Heap. I understand that they are not Irish allotments. There is, so far as I can ascertain, no present risk of displacement of allotment holders in Ireland, and the whole question of allotments is engaging the attention of my advisers.

National Health Insurance (Agents' Remuneration).

Mr. BYRNE asked the Chief Secretary for Ireland whether he is aware that the work of the National Health Insurance Act depends altogether on the exertions of the agents of the various approved societies and that the remuneration given for such services is wholly inadequate, with the result that the Act is only partially in force in Ireland; and if he will introduce an amending Bill by which

agents would be under the direct control of the Irish Insurance Commissioners and paid a suitable salary by them for their services and endowed with authority to take action in all cases of non-compliance with the Act?

Sir E. CORNWALL: I am aware of the excellent way in which the agents of the various approved societies in Ireland as well as in other parts of the United Kingdom discharge the duties which fall upon them in connection with the National Insurance Acts. Their rate of remuneration, however, is a matter for the societies themselves to determine, and does not come within the province of the Commissioners. There is no intention of introducing legislation in the direction suggested by the hon. Member, for the reason given in my answer to him on the 24th instant.

Prisons (Disciplinary Punishments).

Mr. E. HARVEY asked the Home Secretary whether he has considered recent evidence from America showing that the new methods in use at Auburn and Sing Sing Prisons in New York State have improved the standard of conduct of the prisoners, reducing the number of cases in which prisoners have had to be punished for offences against discipline and having marked effect on former recidivists; and whether he will encourage at least some experiment in this direction in one or more British prisons?

Sir G. CAVE: I am not in possession of any official evidence showing the effect on the conduct of prisoners of the new regulations recently introduced in certain prisons in New York State; but it appears from various reports in the Press and otherwise that opinion differs greatly as to their value. I am not in present circumstances prepared to make experiments in the direction suggested by the hon. Member.

Postal Service, Maldon.

Sir F. FLANNERY asked the Postmaster-General whether his attention has been called to the inconvenience arising from recent changes in the postal services to and from the borough of Maldon; whether he is aware that these changes will postpone the first delivery of morning letters until 8.45 and later, and will also accelerate the last collection of letters so that the collection will close at 6.30 p.m.;

whether he is aware that Maldon is a separate borough and the centre of a large trade in the distribution of food both by sea and land, with munition works, iron factories, saw mills, and flour mills of large size, in addition to a number of commercial and private residents, many of whom leave Maldon for London at eight o'clock and do not return until after the postal collection above referred to, and that their correspondence will be delayed by the recent change for at least one day; whether he is aware that the principal post office is now open for only eight hours per day instead of twelve, as formerly; that the deliveries have been reduced from three to two per day, and that the last collection for London is now at 6.30 p.m. instead of 10.30 p.m.; whether the change was made in consequence of increased remuneration asked for by the mail driver by reason of the price of oats and fodder; if so, will he say whether such increase was substantial; whether any steps were taken to obtain tenders for the work; and whether he will arrange to revert to the same postal service as formerly, or, failing this, will he receive a deputation of the mayor, alderman, and town council upon the subject?

Mr. ILLINGWORTH: The facts with regard to the postal service are as stated by the hon. Baronet. The mail contractor asked for an increase of remuneration (amounting to about 30 per cent.). No useful purpose would have been served by inviting tenders for a fresh contract, as it was evident that the maintenance of the road service would involve considerable increase in expense, and no sufficient reason was seen for making an exception in favour of the Maldon district to the policy which, wherever practicable, has been pursued throughout the Kingdom generally in cases where the continuance of a mail service by road would involve an increased burden on the State. I do not think that a deputation at the present time would serve any useful purpose, as the change is so recent; but if after, say, three months it is still desired to make further representations, I shall be prepared to reopen the question.

Housing (Scotland).

Sir EDWARD PARROTT asked the Secretary for Scotland whether and, if so, when he proposes to introduce legislation on the lines of the Report of the Royal

Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban?

Mr. MUNRO: The Report is receiving my anxious consideration in consultation

with my colleagues in His Majesty's Government and my advisers in Scotland, but beyond referring to the pledges already given by the Government to deal with the housing question, I cannot as yet give any definite undertaking as to legislation.

ORDERS OF THE DAY.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE.

Mr. McKENNA: Will the right hon. Gentleman say whether the House is to sit on Friday, and, if so, what will be the business?

Mr. BONAR LAW: I noticed last week, when I made the statement that the House would not meet on Friday, that that seemed to be very acceptable to hon. Members. I know that there is a great strain on Government officials when we meet five days a week, and I believe that, in the present state of work of all kinds, it is equally a strain on hon. Members of the House. We are anxious to get on with the business, but in these circumstances we shall not meet on Friday until it is necessary, and we do not propose that we shall sit on Friday of this week.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE: Why cannot the Education Bill be taken on Friday?

Mr. BONAR LAW: Surely the hon. Member must know from his long connection with this House that, if we used every Friday from now until the end of the Session for that purpose, there would not be the ghost of a chance of that Bill being passed.

Mr. R. LAMBERT: When will the Third Reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill be taken?

Mr. BONAR LAW: The Second Reading will be taken on Thursday. The question of business proposed, I understand, will be indicated on Thursday.

SUPPLY—[30TH OCTOBER].

SUPPLEMENTARY VOTE OF CREDIT, 1917-18.

Resolution reported, "that a Supplementary sum, not exceeding £400,000,000, be granted to His Majesty, beyond the ordinary Grants of Parliament, towards defraying the Expenses which may be incurred during the year ending the 31st day of March, 1918, for General Navy and Army Services in so far as specific provision is not made therefor by Parliament; for the conduct of Naval and Military Operations; for all measures which may be taken for the Security of the Country;

for assisting the Food Supply, and promoting the Continuance of Trade, Industry, Business, and Communications, whether by means of insurance or indemnity against risk, the financing of the purchase and re-sale of foodstuffs and materials, or otherwise; for Relief of Distress; and generally for all expenses, beyond those provided for in the ordinary Grants of Parliament, arising out of the existence of a state of war."

Mr. RUNCIMAN: For the convenience of the House it is desirable from time to time to review the measures which are taken by the Government for

4.0 P.M. dealing with the supplies of food in this country, not only because the supplies if they are abundant will tend to soothe public feeling here, and if they are short will tend to destroy the healthy public opinion without which no Government could wage war, but because the House, in dealing from time to time with financial problems, ascertains how far its regulations are making inroads on the national exchequer without making a commensurate return to the consumer. I do not make any reference this afternoon to the subsidy given to the loaf, although I am sure the Chancellor of the Exchequer must have had many misgivings in budgetting for £14,000,000 additional to his expenditure, with the object of reducing the price of the loaf to 9d., and keeping it at that level. But I think it is right that we should have some information, not only for our guidance here, but for guidance outside, where the subject is of much more interest than apparently it is within the four walls of this House, as to the way in which the Government is attempting to cheapen commodities which are necessary for the sustenance of our people. With that object I propose to draw the attention of the House this afternoon to four separate topics. The first I only mention in passing, with the object of suggesting to the Government that unless they give more satisfactory information in the future than in the past they will find it difficult to justify their policy with the general public. I take, first of all, the way in which they have, by their administrative action, raised the freights on the carriage of various foodstuffs since they have taken complete control of the shipping. We had a question this afternoon with reference to the carriage of tea. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington has both inside this House and out-

side the House drawn attention to the way in which the freight for the carriage of tea from Ceylon to this country has been raised by administrative action. As long ago as July of this year attention was drawn to the fact that the rate of freight charged for the carriage of tea from Colombo to this country has been put up by the Ministry of Shipping.

Tea is carried from Calcutta on the basis of 50 cubic feet to the ton, and when a contract was entered into—I am speaking of Colombo for the moment—just after the outbreak of War, the rate was fixed between the importer in this country over what is known as the “conference line,” running from the East, at the rate of 40s. a ton on this basis. The House has had its attention drawn to the fact that those rates under the administration of the Ministry of Shipping reached 270s. from some parts, and 300s. from other parts. I am not going to dwell upon these items, but I wish to mention them in passing. If you turn from the East to the Western Colonies in Africa, there you will find on the lines running from the West Coast Colonies, taken over by the Ministry of Shipping, that the rates on practically everything have been put up. Questions have been asked by various hon. Members throughout the summer as to the reason of the raising of the rates of freight. I am within the recollection of the House when I say that not a single Member of the House was satisfied with the explanations that were offered, and the fact now remains that up to the present time there has been no adequate justification given of the increased burden which is thrown on the consumers here in connection with all commodities because of the increased freights which have been decreed by the Ministry of Shipping. When the bills of lading on wheat are compared with the rate paid for shipowners carrying wheat into this country, they show a great discrepancy between the figures. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Shipping has explained to the House that this is purely a bookkeeping arrangement, and that we need have no anxiety about the portion being borne by the consumers. We must accept that explanation, but I feel quite sure that my hon. Friend will see that his explicit statement will be carried out in fact. When you come to any other commodity not owned by the Government, such as cocoa, coffee, and a number of staple articles of

food, in every one of those cases the difference in the actual net cost to the Government of carrying them into this country under its requisition has not accrued to the consumer. If these vessels are taken over at a cheap rate, the whole of the economy resulting therefrom should accrue to the consumer. The first point I wish to make is as to the cost of carriage. After all, the Government have control of nine-tenths of British shipping, and, so far as the cost has been reduced, the Government should not in any way accumulate a credit balance for the Ministry of Shipping, or indirectly for the Exchequer, but it should be for the sole benefit of those who consume these commodities in these islands.

The next point I wish to put is this: The Government have seen fit, from time to time, to fix maximum prices for various commodities produced in these islands. I have no criticism as to the policy of fixing maximum prices for commodities which are produced here; if I may say so, if I had been in the same position as Lord Devonport and as Lord Rhondda I should have felt bound, under the circumstances, to say that in the case of the few commodities produced in this country, produced and grown here, it was necessary to have a maximum limit beyond which the prices should not proceed. But in fixing the maximum prices you are dealing with one of the most delicate instruments for which the market can be used. If you fix the prices too low you will not get production; if you fix them too high you pinch the consumer, without keeping down to a great degree the profits of the producer; and the result would be that a great many surreptitious bargains would be forced upon those engaged in these trades that proceed along competitive lines. I will take the case of gooseberries produced for jam here. The Food Department decided that the maximum price should be £20 a ton delivered on rail, and £3 to be allowed to cover cost of commission, carriage, and everything. When that maximum price was fixed there was no doubt that the purchasers of gooseberries in large quantities, and the general public were entitled to expect that the maximum price was a near approximation to the fair market value, and that it was for the purpose of eliminating the whole element of profiteering. If the maximum had been put at £40 a ton, that maximum price would have been regarded as unreal. The impression

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given by the maximum price of £20 a ton was that it was the real price, having some relation to the crop expected, and to the demands made upon it. Indeed, outside people naturally thought that the Government were much better informed than private individuals on these matters, and that the £20 was a fair indication of a short crop, or a fairly short crop.

What has been the result of fixing the price at £20? First of all, a tendency was shown for bargaining on that basis, and, although this may be regarded as a reasonable maximum, transactions were carried through in great numbers for large quantities, at £17, £12, and £10, and I am assured by those engaged in this trade that business throughout the season has been done at from £12 to £15, which would have been a fair figure for gooseberries instead of the £20 decreed by the Ministry of Food. There seems to have been something seriously wrong with the estimating on which that figure was reached. Let me take two or three other classes of produce—damsons and plums. In the same way the maximum price began at £17, according to the decree, yet damsons were bought freely at various times of the season at £6 a ton, and even now, at this date, they can be bought at £10. Plums were fixed at £15 10s., in this case including the £3 covering carriage, etc.; yet plums have been bought freely at £7, and the Ministry of Food appears to have made a bad shot. I cite these instances merely to point out how dangerous it is for any Government Department to fix maximum prices without being equipped with the very best technical and commercial knowledge that is obtainable; knowledge that they may be quite sure is not actuated by market interests, from which they ought to stand quite clear. This is an example of the first category of maximum prices. They have given trouble in the market here and have led to a certain amount of expenditure by consumers by putting the price above the level at which the market would itself have provided the food. Let me take two or three categories of food-stuffs which are grown to some extent here, but which must be imported largely from abroad.

The House will remember that on more than one occasion reference has been made to the fact of fixing the maximum price of beans too low. I have given the

cases of prices fixed too high, let me give the cases of prices fixed too low. The price of beans was fixed at £42 wholesale, and £56 retail per ton. At that very moment importers in this country had been buying beans from America and elsewhere for delivery here at no less than £80, £85, and £88 a ton, but as they were not to sell retail over £56, they burned their fingers badly. Whatever may be said about the high profits of merchants, merchants are a necessary element in the distribution of food, and it is quite certain that they, like other people, if they find that owing to the action of the Government they are liable to lose £30, £35 or £40, on an £80 transaction, they will not repeat the operation. That is exactly what has taken place. I have got in my hands sheaves of letters from various importers of beans and peas, and similar categories of food—American oats, for instance—into this country, which show that, owing to the action taken by the Ministry of Food, they and other purchasers abroad will not repeat their purchases. I am not here speaking for the merchants, who are well able to look after their own interests, but I would point out from the public point of view that it is damaging. It means that you keep out of the country a great deal of necessary food. The merchants—who formerly, in the ordinary course of their business, worked with overdrafts which they gradually paid off as the produce came forward—now will not enter into any of these purchases, because they know that they mean a certain loss. It is true that many of those merchants who formerly operated on overdrafts gradually reduced from year to year have got bank balances, but those bank balances are lying more or less dormant. Bank balances may be a good or a bad thing in our banking system, but the consumer gets no satisfaction out of them. It is not bank balances we want for the support of our people, but full warehouses, and empty importing warehouses are a great danger. What I have said applies equally to oatmeal and, to some extent, to such commodities as tinned goods. Those are three instances where I hope the Government may see fit to revise their policy and see if they cannot devise better means of dealing with each than by taking artificial action, the effect of which has been largely to reduce the abundance of our supplies here.

Those remarks are with regard to articles that come mainly from abroad, but let me take the case of potatoes, which provides us with a working model of how not to use the limits of either maximum or minimum prices. At the beginning of this year a guarantee was given by the Government that for potatoes grown this year—and I am now talking of standard quality of a certain size and so on—£6 per ton was to be the minimum. Indeed, there was some doubt about it at first, and the Departments themselves, in the announcements that they published, gave a variety of information in the early months of the year. It was finally cleared up, I think, on the 2nd May, by an announcement issued by the President of the Board of Agriculture, in which he said:

"In answer to the inquiries which have been addressed to the Board of Agriculture as to the guaranteed minimum price for potatoes promised in the Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons on the 23rd February last, the President wishes it to be known that the promise is to be interpreted on the lines indicated by the previous offer made by the Food Controller. The Government guarantee is to the grower at a price of £6 per ton free on rail and free on board for all sound marketable potatoes grown in 1917. Detailed Regulations will be issued."

Whether it was on the strength of that announcement or not, the fact remains that in this country there was a large increase in the acreage devoted to the growing of potatoes. In Ireland the increase amounted to 117,000 acres extra, in Scotland 20,000 acres, and in England and Wales 80,000 acres. The season has been good for potatoes, the acreage has been large, and the result is that we end up this year with a crop which must be something like 8,000,000 tons, which is probably the best potato crop we have had in Great Britain in our generation, and certainly more abundant as compared with last year than any of us could have anticipated when the total crop worked out at about 5,500,000 tons, if my memory serves me right. Having got this abundance, what is the effect of the minimum guarantee as it is now decreed by Order? First of all, there is a great deal of the crop which farmers must sell quickly or it will perish. There has been a good deal of wet, and, apart from that, a fair proportion of the crop must be sold pretty quickly. If it is not sold it will be destroyed, and indeed in some districts it is already being fed off to stock. Some transactions we know have gone through at from £3 10s. to £4 per ton, and I know that in Ireland potatoes have been selling freely at from £3 10s. to £4 per

ton. Indeed, up to the date when the Order become operative you might take £4 as a fair average market price for potatoes. It was purely owing to the artificial boundary of the date of the Order that the price jumped from £4 to £6 per ton.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Mayo (Mr. Dillon) asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer the other day whether, in the case of those transactions going on at the pre-mid-September prices, those who had sold at below £6 would be subject to prosecution, and no answer was given. I observe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said to-day that if any man sold below £6 he did a very foolish thing. Surely I am right in saying that under the Order as it stands he not only does a foolish thing but a criminal act. What I think we ought to have cleared up to-day, and I hope the President of the Board of Agriculture will help us in this, is to know whether if a man gives the consumer the benefit of the potatoes at £4 per ton, is he going to be prosecuted or is he not? Is he merely to be branded as a foolish fellow by my right hon. Friend, or to be prosecuted by the agents of the Crown and to be subject to summary conviction, fine, or imprisonment, or whatever may be the penalty, because he allows the consumer to get the benefit of the abundance of this year, not, I would observe to my right hon. Friend, an abundance entirely due to the minimum price, but to some extent due to the goodness of God, for we have had a good season. Does not anybody suppose that, having got a good season, it is the consumer who ought to get the benefit of that as well as the producer. When you deal with these matters as they will be dealt with by the consumer and the householder, I think it is a very difficult matter for the Government to say that they will not allow these potatoes to be sold in the open market direct. Take what has happened up to the present. In many of our potato markets potatoes have been sold very freely in some districts at from 4s. to 4s. 6d. per cwt. wholesale, while the September Order fixes the price at 6s. In other words, the householder, to turn it into terms of retail prices, was able to buy his or her potatoes at 9d. per stone, and the Order decrees that she must not buy at 9d. but now must pay 1s. 2d. This is so much an inversion of the policy which has been pursued by the Government previously

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that I cannot believe that they mean it seriously, for the consumer will get no satisfaction out of this method of increasing supplies of our food stuffs, and it is so contrary to the policy pursued with regard to flour that I cannot believe that it expresses the true policy of the Government.

But see what the effect of keeping the price up to £6 per ton really comes to. In the first place it tends, I cannot say more than that, to the consumption of more bread, and at the very time you are asking everyone to eat less bread you are refusing to cheapen one of the main starchy commodities which may be called in as a substitute for bread. That is the first thing. The second thing is that on the basis of a £6 per ton price you cannot profitably mill potatoes into flour. A baker may in small quantities put potatoes into loaves at about this price, producing a heavier and a smaller loaf, which will not be so popular as the larger and the lighter loaf, but the miller who wishes to put potato flour into wheat flour cannot do it at £6 per ton and make it pay, though at £3 per ton he probably could. Then consider the fact that the forcing of the consumption of bread by artificially keeping down the consumption of potatoes means not only that we tend to consume more wheat here, but it actually reduces the total gross amount of human food available for the Allies. It is notorious that both France and Italy will have to provide, or have provided, for them more wheat and maize in the coming twelve months than they had to provide last year. A smaller crop in both countries has been the natural result of bad weather and large armies. So far has this gone that I am informed that a good many vessels on their way to this country recently have been diverted from our ports to French ports, and possibly it may be to Italian ports, and that we are, in fact, living on our stocks.

Let me say a word of commendation to the Wheat Commission for the energy with which they have increased our stocks. They set about this matter with tremendous vigour. It is true they did that without paying much respect to cost, but it was inevitable that they must put up the price if they were to increase the quantities coming into this country. They have succeeded in raising our stocks

to an unprecedented figure. We are living on these stocks, so I am informed, at present, and when I say "I am informed" I mean through the ordinary mercantile channels, for I have no official information, and vessels are now being diverted to France and Italy. Surely this is the very moment when we ought to provide our people with a substitute for bread; and we ought to provide them with the thing which last year they would give almost anything to possess, and which this year they would buy more freely; were it not for the effect of the £6 limit, not so much on their pockets as on their minds. You must remember that people who have been in the habit of buying potatoes up to the date of the September Order at 9d. per stone are not going suddenly to abandon that at the mere dictum of the Government and pay 1s. 2d. per stone. There is a reluctance on their part to do so. They know that surreptitious sales go on at lower price, and they are all hoping that by decree of the Government the market will be set free, and that they will be able to come in and buy freely. It is merely a mental effect, but it has its effect on markets and households. What I invite the Government to do is to say that they are going to throw the market open, so that everybody will benefit by the abundant crop.

I should like to ask how the Government propose to deal with the farmer, especially the farmer who planted on the strength of the guarantee? The farmer who planted on the strength of the guarantee is not easily identified, for there are many farmers who, indeed, would have planted potatoes last spring, since with a great many of them it is their regular business, and certainly if there had been no guarantee at all they would have planted, in so far as the abundance of seed potatoes and labour would have permitted. But there must be a considerable number who did actually plant on the strength of the guarantee. It would be wrong of the Government to repudiate the guarantee, and I was interested to hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer say this afternoon that under no circumstances would they do that. If they are going to deal with this problem and give any feeling of security to those interested in the production of food, those people must have the knowledge that there will be no variation in Government policy so

far as the guarantee is concerned. The feeling of insecurity which has driven merchants out of foreign markets would drive our own farmers out of production. How is the gap to be made up between the market price of £4 and the £6 guarantee? How is it to be filled up? The Government must carry out its guarantee and, if I may say so, I think the consumer must have the benefit of open market rates. Is that to fall on the Exchequer? If it does, I do not know what the burden will come to. Perhaps the President of the Board of Agriculture will tell us, but it must be somewhere in the region of £10,000,000 from the Exchequer, and this added burden on the top of the £40,000,000 for the loaf is surely a charge which the Chancellor of the Exchequer could not have anticipated a few months ago, and which must lead to embarrassment in his own Department, where estimates under normal conditions are cut rather fine. If I may say so, I think the right hon. Gentleman yesterday cut his Estimates very fine. An extra £10,000,000 to be spent will disturb those Estimates. It may make it necessary for him, with the approval of the House, to raise more of his income by further taxation to find that £10,000,000. If so, does he think it is well that, for instance, a good many growers of potatoes, who grow potatoes in the ordinary way of business, should receive this very large subsidy?

There is within the knowledge of the House a certain number of able business men who grow 5, 6, 7, or 8,000 acres of potatoes in the course of the year. Some of them have done so to their profit in the past, and, I believe, to the general benefit of British agriculture and British trade. They would have gone on growing these 5, 6, 7, or 8,000 acres of potatoes anyhow in their regular business. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Who are they?"] If the hon. Member doubts my word I will give him the names of the growers. Some of these are well-known to many hon. Members of this House. Some of them have been good enough, from time to time, to give their services to the Government, and very ably have they performed the duties allotted to them. See what it means? Suppose that a grower, say, of 7,000 acres of potatoes should get a yield of 8 tons per acre, and the amount that had to be paid to him by the Exchequer came to £2 per ton. That, surely, is a very large amount

to go into his pocket out of the Exchequer, purely because of a guarantee which may or may not have been a mistaken policy. Why, £100,000 spent in this way is not worth the while! At the very time when the whole policy of the Government is to abolish what is called profiteering, I think the Government will find it difficult to justify large payments of this kind. They set public opinion against them by attempting to deal with the problem on this basis. It is because of the difficulties that have arisen, because of this large expenditure at the very time when we ought to be reducing our expenditure, so far as we can, in order that we may prolong our strength for the conclusion of the War, that I do ask the Government to reconsider their whole policy in regard to the fixing of prices, and in so far as they can do so, avoid in future any arrangement which produces a heavy charge on our national revenue.

Colonel COLLINS: The right hon. Gentleman has this afternoon opened out a subject of deep interest concerning Government interference with prices and production. In the closing sentences he referred to certain potato growers who, under certain circumstances, might receive £100,000. He omitted to inform the House that these particular persons would not pay any Excess Profits Duty upon that money. I have no desire this afternoon to refer in detail to the particular commodities to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, but I am anxious to intrude for a very few minutes to place one or two general considerations about prices before the House of Commons, and at the end to place a definite suggestion before the Chancellor of the Exchequer. So long as competition is an active and a virile force the House of Commons has no desire that the Government should interfere. In the early stages of the War, when competition broke down, Government interference was essential. If and when the Government interferes, if on the one hand excessive profits are not eliminated, the public are forced ultimately to pay higher prices on account of that interference. On the other hand, if they eliminate excessive profits, the ultimate result is not to injure the owners, producers, or distributors, and for this reason: the Government fix a flat rate, which must be governed or influenced by the less efficient owner, producer, or dis-

[Colonel Collins.]

tributer. With his profits assured and competition in prices eliminated, what is the result? The man's struggle to maintain his position is safeguarded. Day by day the fear, which is an ever present thing to every business man as to his ability to pay 20s. in the £, is removed. That, I think, is one of the ultimate results of Government interference in the matter of prices. In that case I submit to the House that Government interference in the long run raises prices. How have the Government acted in this matter? There has evidently been no central brain directing and controlling the various Controllors and the various spenders of the public purse. As the right hon. Gentleman has well shown, the House of Commons has no desire to restrict reasonable profits on the one hand, and reasonable rates of wages on the other hand. But it is notorious that certain trades have received particular favour from the Government, and I may instance the agricultural trade, and timber as well.

How have these prices been fixed? When the submarine activity became pronounced prices rose rapidly; the upward curve showed a sharp rise. The Government fixed these prices, and those concerned accepted this new level of prices. I submit to the House they should instead have adopted the principle of fixing prices based on the cost of production. I am aware that the Government have had this matter under consideration for some time, but in all this fixing of prices there has been no clear principle directing their various activities. They appear to deal with each interest as it arises. That is a very human method of dealing with problems; especially under a Parliamentary system of government, where particular interests can bring direct pressure to bear. The same result happened when increased demands for wages came from the trade unions and other bodies. As I have already said, no hon. Member is anxious to restrict a reasonable rate of profit or a reasonably increased rate of wages, but competition has distinctly broken down, both in the supply of commodities and in the supply of labour. There must, I submit, be some finality in this upward trend of prices; otherwise, I ask, what will the end be? I agree it is an extremely difficult problem for any Government, and I have no desire to dogmatise in detail on this subject; but I do ask the Government to formulate in this

matter some policy fixing, it may be, a definite rate of profit, and fixing, it may be, a particular percentage on pre-war rates of wages. Let them submit their policy to the House of Commons, secure the assent of employers and trade unions, and then, having fixed his policy, force their will upon the many controllers, upon the many men employed all over the country and elsewhere in spending public money. I appeal to the Government this afternoon to think out some national policy, and bring to an end, to a finality, this upward curve of prices!

The PRESIDENT of the BOARD of AGRICULTURE (Mr. Prothero): I have to speak to the House to-day under one disability; I have the disadvantage of speaking for a Department which is not under my direction. The House is well aware that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Food Controller is, unfortunately, absent through illness, and I have to represent him with a less accurate knowledge of his policy and plan than the Parliamentary Under-Secretary possesses. I hope that the House will, therefore, be indulgent. But I cannot touch upon either the first or the second points which were raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Runciman)—the prices of fruit and the prices of certain vegetables. I am sorry to say that I know nothing about the prices, except this: that they were in both cases, as I understand, fixed by the Food Controller, after consultation with a large expert committee of fruit and vegetable traders. The question of potatoes is one about which I can add no more. Of course, I fully admit that the moment you touch prices artificially, the moment you interfere with the ordinary regulation of those prices by supply and demand, you land yourself in a sea of difficulties. There is no doubt about that. On the other hand, the very fact of the appointment of a Food Controller necessitates interference with prices. Therefore, the moment you desire to appoint a Food Controller—and he was appointed, I believe, with the almost unanimous consent of this House—you begin to interfere with market prices. Why do you interfere with market prices? If the Food Controller has to cut down prices, it is quite obvious that he must interfere with those prices artificially. At all events, I think that is the case. The great, the one point to consider about

these maximum prices, and about the prices of potatoes and similar commodities, is, Has it produced the right effect? Is it justified by economy or not? Is it justified by results? This country is the only belligerent nation which, instead of showing a decline in the productions of the soil, can show an increase. As compared with 1916, there is an increase in our production, under almost unparalleled difficulties of the season, of labour, and the shortage of many of the necessities of agriculture. We can show an increase in production practically right along the line. You have more wheat—I am speaking for England and Wales—you have more barley and oats. The area of oats is the largest on record since 1914. You have a larger area under roots, and you have got this very considerable increase in the area of potatoes.

I gather from my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury that he did not believe that the price fixed for potatoes had very much influence upon the production in the present year. On that point I altogether differ from him. You must remember—if I may take hon. Members back to the period when the price was first fixed—that potatoes themselves had gone up to something like £12 a ton. The Food Controller had power in his discretion to cut this price down to £8 or £9, and he did so. The obvious effect of this upon the mind of the grower for the coming year was that he must be careful whether he grew potatoes or not because of the extraordinarily heavy outlay which would be required in order to produce them. Further than that the potato is a crop which, if grown to any quantity, falls in price most rapidly. If we had grown a crop sufficient to feed ourselves, prices would have gone down to £4. Every grower knows that. What the grower had to face was this: He had to face having to pay something like four times the amount usually paid for seed potatoes. He had to grow the potatoes on land for which he could not find the ordinary fertilisers, and, after all, it is on the amount of fertilisers you put into the land that the increase to 8 tons per acre of which the right hon. Gentleman spoke really depended, and we were also asking a man with rising prices for labour and without fertilisers to help him grow his crop to incur an expenditure of four times the amount usually paid for his seed. When you reflect that you require seedlings to the extent of 1 ton per

acre, you will understand the enormous increase that means in the cost of production.

The price of £6 per ton was based on careful calculation of the cost of production in the present year. I have here before me tables of estimates of the prices which were furnished to the Food Control Department and these show the cost of growing potatoes averages from something like £35 to £42 per acre. Suppose you have got an average crop of potatoes—that is, 6 tons to the acre, and you multiply the 6 tons by £6, you get a sum of £36. That does not show a very large margin of profit to the grower. We had to face that situation, and by fixing the price at £6 per ton I venture to say have secured for this country a record crop—a record crop of valuable food which will relieve the strain upon our shipping as well as upon our finances and provide us with a great quantity of excellent food. Therefore, whatever objection there may be—and there are many—to the policy we pursued, there can be no question as to the excellence of the results obtained; and that is, after all, I venture to submit to the House, the main point. We have got the potatoes, and should there be any great difficulty in disposing of them I would point out it presents a far easier problem to deal with than the problem of dealing with a shortage in the food supply.

When originally that price was arranged by the Food Controller it was done after prolonged consultation, spread over many days. It was the intention of the then Food Controller to buy up the whole of the potato crop at that price and to retail it to the consumer. For some reason or other—of which I am not perfectly aware—that plan has not been carried out, although it is at present being discussed. At any rate, it was the plan that was proposed, and the peculiar form in which the Food Controller drew out his first Order shows that quite clearly. He arranged for a sliding scale of prices which amounted, in the aggregate, to £6. It was £5 10s. in the first instance, £6 in an intermediate period, and £6 5s. or £6 10s. later on. The offer of £6 per ton was made subject to this sliding scale for all 4-ton lots of marketable ware delivered free on rail or on board. It is open to the Food Controller at the present moment to revert to the plan of buying up the whole crop at that price, and when he can get transport to retail it at such a price as he may think

[Mr. Prothero.]

fit. Why nothing has at present been done is this: The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dewsbury stated that we had got a bumper crop. I do not know upon what he bases that assertion.

Mr. RUNCIMAN: We were informed in the House last week that that was so by the representative of the Food Control Department.

Mr. PROTHERO: That is to say, the representative of the Food Control Department no doubt told the House there was a large increased acreage under potatoes?

Mr. RUNCIMAN: I am sure the right hon. Gentleman would not wish to suggest that I invented the phrase. Let me repeat that the hon. Member who represents the Department told us that the estimated crop this year would be 8,000,000 tons. That was said in reply to a question from, I think, this bench.

Mr. PROTHERO: At all events, my point is this: It is necessarily an estimate because much of the crop is still in the ground, and until it has been lifted you cannot say what the yield will be. All that we do know is, that there is a certain acreage under potatoes, and that according to the average the crop will amount to so-and-so, but until you definitely know how much there is you cannot profess to deal with it on a large scale. I think that is an obvious argument. In Ireland, for instance, I believe the potatoes are not lifted until late autumn or early winter. They certainly have not yet been lifted to any very great extent in England. When hon. Members say that farmers would be willing to sell for £4 10s. their present crop, I think no doubt they would. But what would be the effect? You would have rushed upon the market a great quantity of potatoes, far more than it could deal with, and as a consequence much of the crop would be wasted. You cannot do it at once for one special reason, that the demand at the present moment for potatoes is, it must be remembered, unusually small owing to the quantity of potatoes grown for domestic consumption by a quadrupled number of gardeners all over the country. That is a fact which does not appear in any statistics. But it is a fact which strongly governs the present demand for potatoes. Of course the farmer wants to rush his potatoes on

to the market. Obviously he would. In the first place potatoes weigh more heavily now than they will six months hence, and, in the second place, if he can put them on the market now, he will not require to clamp them, and he will not run the risk of loss through their becoming diseased. All these points have to be considered by the Food Controller before he can arrange his scheme for dealing with the potato crop, and if there is any delay at the present moment it is due to the fact that he is considering various ways in which to deal with the crop, ways in which he can receive the flux and also various ways in which large quantities can be preserved until later in the year, and indeed until May and June next.

This is not as simple a problem as the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dewsbury seemed to suggest in his speech. It bristles with difficulties at every turn, and you cannot ask the Food Controller to hurry his decision at the present moment. I may say he is very doubtful, and I rather share his doubt, whether to reduce the price of potatoes to the consumer by $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per lb. is likely to largely increase the demand for potatoes. I very much doubt if it is. The present price, be it remembered, provides efficient control over the profits of the wholesaler and retailer while the consumer has to pay 1d. per lb. Remember that that is being paid in the fourth year of a great war, and if he can get them at 1d. per lb. I do not think you are going to largely increase the consumption by reducing that price by $\frac{1}{4}$ d. To my mind that is very doubtful. It is, however, one of the many points which we have to consider, and it will be considered very carefully. Then the Food Controller has to consider various ways of dealing with this estimated flux. We have plans, for instance, for converting these potatoes into flour. We have plans for using them straightway in the making of bread. We have plans also for using them for industrial alcohol, and if to any great extent they can be used for that purpose, if the crop is so large that without risk to human food we can so use them, we shall find that we have a most valuable source of motive power here in this country home-made. All these are questions which arise out of the problem of potatoes, and I venture to submit to the House that if the Food Controller has at present not evolved a cut-and-dried plan, he is considering all these different

problems, and as soon as he knows what the exact surplus is he will be prepared to act.

Of course, I quite agree that the sooner we get a solution of this difficulty the better. I do not want it

5.0 P.M. drawn out for a single moment; but, until we do know the actual figures it is, I venture to think, idle to complain that we are not dealing with this potato problem. Supposing, for instance, the Government went into the market and bought up large quantities of potatoes for distilling into industrial alcohol, and afterwards we found that this crop was not such a marvellously good one after all; or that a very severe frost had diminished the quantity, as it well might, by half a million tons. What a foolish position the Food Controller would be placed in! From every point of view, therefore, I submit that the House must wait in patience for the Food Controller to take action on this point. I also think that if you consider the great risks that were run—and they were great risks—by the growers of potatoes, and the way in which they rallied to our appeal, or the appeal, if you like to say, of the £6 a ton, no one would wish the Government to back down from the offer that was made to them. What we did was to appeal not merely to the men who grew potatoes and who knew all about it. We were dealing with a very large number of men who probably had never grown potatoes in their field before, people who were not up to the tricks of the trade, who did not understand it on a large scale like that, and we had, I venture to think, to give those men the guarantee that if they grew potatoes, whether their crop fell down to the extent of £4 or rose to the average of £6, they would be assured of getting their £6 per ton.

As the Leader of the House has said, it is the Government's intention in some way or other—and there are various plans that are now before the Food Controller for combining that performance of the promise to the farmer with a free, uncontrolled market—to keep faith with the farmer. The essential feature of it is that the faith of the Government with the farmer should be kept. I should like once more to remind the House where we should be if we had not this enormous quantity of potatoes. We should be in the greatest possible need. There it is, and the methods of dealing with it are par-

ticularly difficult and complicated. One other point I should like to put to the House is this. There are certain varieties which will keep, and there are certain varieties which are more or less perishable. Are we to encourage the farmer to rush those potatoes which have keeping qualities into the market now, or are we to try and use the whole supply with the greatest economy, so as to preserve the food for the nation? I regret very much that the Food Controller should not have had justice done to his position by one who was more conversant with his policy and plans than I am. Whatever may have been my differences and those of the Food Controller in the past, I have always felt that the Food Controller is the man who occupies the most difficult position in this country, that he has to discharge a most thankless task, and that it is only the highest sense of public duty which induces him to remain in that office.

Mr. LOUGH: I am sure that the whole House has listened with the greatest interest to the speech of the right hon. Gentleman who has just sat down; but before inviting consideration of one or two of his very remarkable propositions I would like to ask this question of the Leader of the House—Do the Government consider that the right hon. Gentleman who has just sat down has given an answer to the question that has been put with regard to potatoes, namely, how is the Government guarantee to be fulfilled? The right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Prothero) has made a most remarkable speech. My right hon. Friend (Mr. Runciman) asked a most direct question: "Will the growers who have already had to sell at £4 be prosecuted?" He received no answer. The question has been put in the opposite way by myself and other hon. Members at Question time: "Will those forced by circumstances to sell under the guarantee be compensated?" No answer was given to that. It is no use for the right hon. Gentleman to stand up here and tell the House that the Food Controller is in a difficult position. I am going to analyse that; and my answer is that he has put himself in that difficult position. It is the part of government to get out of difficulty, and I say we have had no fulfilment to-day of the promise that the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Bonar Law) gave yesterday. I would appeal to the Leader of the House as to whether he did not tell

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me yesterday that if I put a question at the end of Questions to-day he would give an answer.

The **CHANCELLOR** of the **EX-CHEQUER** (Mr. Bonar Law): No. The right hon. Gentleman came to me privately and said it would greatly help the Debate to-day if we would give an answer. I said we would give one if it were possible to do so.

Mr. LOUGH: Yes; but the right hon. Gentleman gave us a far more specific answer than that when my first question was put. His answer was that the War Cabinet had been considering this problem and had arrived at a decision upon it.

Mr. BONAR LAW: Not at all. The right hon. Gentleman must try to be a little more accurate about his facts. I said that the War Cabinet had considered it, that it was an extremely complicated and difficult problem, but that I hoped in a few days to be able to give the decision.

Mr. LOUGH: I wish I had time to consult the **OFFICIAL REPORT**. The words were, "a day or two," and in consequence of this promise I went across and asked the right hon. Gentleman whether it would be to-morrow.

Mr. BONAR LAW: The right hon. Gentleman came over to me. I said I was not at all sure that I should be able to answer him. He said, "Well, give me the best answer you can." That was all.

Mr. LOUGH: I am always anxious for the Government to do the best they can; and I must say that if what they have done this afternoon is their best they leave this House and the country in an extraordinary position. They have admitted up to this moment that it is a difficult matter. Is it to be laughed away in the way that the right hon. Gentleman who has just addressed the House attempted to do? He says we must await with patience the action of the Food Controller. I reply that the Food Controller himself will not wait. He issued a potato Order last week. He issued another a month ago. He is bursting with impatience. I spent a most miserable hour this morning with the Food Controller. [Laughter.] Well, we are very good friends, and I hope I am with the right hon. Gentleman opposite. Perhaps the Food Controller did not enjoy it any more than did the Leader of the House. That

was not my fault. I had a good case to present, and it was because the ways of transgressors are hard that he may not have enjoyed his position, as the right hon. Gentlemen opposite do not enjoy theirs. He was fixing a price which is causing the greatest disturbance in the country. I mean tea. He was fixing a price that is to come into effect to-morrow, and he has given a fortnight's notice about it. I said, "Wait a little until you have looked into the difficulty," but we could not get him to wait a moment. He was full of impatience. There is not a day on which I do not get a fresh Order from the Food Controller, and up gets the right hon. Gentleman and says, amid a lot of other extraordinary circumstances, "Give him time, and let him go slowly." That is what the House and country would like him to do; to drop all these orders of his for two or three months; and it would be a great benefit to the whole country. That is the main point that arises out of the right hon. Gentleman's speech, but let me just ask the House's consideration for a moment to one or two of his axiomatic statements. He said that the Food Controller had fixed prices in consultation with the growers. What an extraordinary thing to do. Did you ever know growers who would not ask a big price? That is what the country complains of, and it is the House of Commons that has to put the case of the consumers, who are much more numerous. Then the right hon. Gentleman made this statement, and it reminded me of some very doubtful propositions he laid down in his last speech. As I am criticising him so severely, let me say that three weeks ago he made an excellent speech about beef. He then stood on my platform, and what was he doing there? After a profusion of compliments to the Food Controller, he attacked him more severely than any man has done.

Mr. PROTHERO: I beg the right hon. Gentleman's pardon. Has he a copy of the report of my speech? Because I think he is going on an entirely mistaken idea.

Mr. LOUGH: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I read the speech most carefully. I thought it a most delightful speech by a man on a subject which he understood—a thing that we do not always get from those Benches. Especially, I read all he said about the Food Controller, who has been under my eye. The right hon. Gentleman first used a number of compliments, and then said,

"Now, I am going to have a smack at him." He proceeded to shake his head over the maximum prices that had been fixed for beef. There was a great row about it, and the right hon. Gentleman should hear what the Food Controller said privately about his speech, which I had the opportunity of hearing. What happened then? On the following Tuesday the Food Controller and the right hon. Gentleman stood on the same platform and embraced one another in public. On what conditions? That the Food Controller withdrew his maximum price which he had been stating for two months, like the laws of the Medes and the Persians, could not be altered. I congratulate him. I had been in Ireland six weeks previous to that, and we had done a great deal in Ireland to get the matter reconsidered, but once we got the right hon. Gentleman with us then down came the Food Controller. The right hon. Gentleman laid down the principle that the position of the Food Controller necessitates interference with prices. I do not agree at all, and I ask the House to consider that a little more. The mistake of the Food Controller is in interfering with prices in all directions every day. What ought he to do? He is not there to interfere with prices, but to control food. Let him get the food in and leave the prices alone, and he will do a great deal more satisfactorily than he is doing at present. When the right hon. Gentleman lays it down that the Food Controller must interfere with prices, I say that he is making one of the greatest mistakes that the Government is making at the present time, and I warn them that if they are not careful there will be such an uprising in the country about it as will seriously interfere with the conduct of the War.

My right hon. Friend said he did not believe that the guarantee of £6 a ton had really helped the production of this great potato crop this year, and my right hon. Friend opposite tried to deal with that question, but I suggest that he dealt with it most unfairly, because the House must look at it from this point of view. The Government were interfering with the price of potatoes when the guarantee was given. They would not allow farmers to get in February, March, and April the price they might have got for their potatoes. Farmers were prosecuted for charging too much in the spring, and now they are being prosecuted for charging too little in

the autumn. How can farmers or other classes of business men proceed when the Government treat them in this way? Does the large potato crop depend on the guarantee, or does it depend on other circumstances over which the Government have no control? My right hon. Friend suggested that it probably depended on other circumstances. I entirely agree. The prices which could have been obtained for potatoes last spring would itself have been an inducement, and if there had been little interference then with the maximum price the condition of things would have been far better than it is at the present time. I am entitled to remind the House of one or two facts connected with this business. Why were potatoes scarce last spring? Why was this artificial scarcity created? Simply because the Army bought more potatoes than were necessary. They greedily bought up everything, and pushed the price up to the height it reached. We have one Department taking every step to cause prices to go up, and then the Government appointing Food Controllers and other doubtful characters to bring them down. I had another remarkable answer in a question yesterday. I found out secretly that the Foreign Office had been buying potatoes.

Mr. PRINGLE: The Unseen Hand!

Mr. LOUGH: I asked the Foreign Office why they had gone into the market, and what was the result of the transaction. I have been informed that they got 12,000 tons, but I was told yesterday they had only 2,000 tons. What did they pay for them? I was informed that the transaction was not complete, but that they had paid £440,000—£200 a ton. [An Hon. MEMBER: "No!"] I think it works out at something like that, but, at any rate, the cost was £440,000. We heard that there were no potatoes at all in the spring, so if we paid £440,000 and got none, I ask the House to calculate what the price of potatoes was. The day when the taxpayer comes to look into these matters, I think the Government who were responsible will have a rude awakening. I have been told there was a loss of £60,000 on the Spanish transaction. I want to draw a general conclusion. If the Government had never touched the potato they would have been a great deal better off; if they had left it to those great laws of supply and demand, which are held in such contempt by a certain section of this House, and if they had allowed the exce!

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lent system of distribution which exists in this country with regard to potatoes as other commodities, they would have been saved from the great difficulties in which they find themselves now.

We are supposed to be discussing a very important Finance Bill. I ask the House to recognise that the points which my right hon. Friend raised in his excellent speech, and to which I am directing attention, really affect the finances of this country to a degree which the House and country at present do not recognise. In the statement made yesterday, which I think was much too hopeful a statement—and I am sorry my right hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth took it at its face value; he ought to be a little more critical about these statements from the Front Bench—there was one statement that £74,000,000 had been paid by the Government for produce which they had not received. I have constantly suggested from this Box that in these transactions the Government ought to consult people skilled in business, and one principle I find merchants in the City of London very strong upon is this, that they do not pay for things until they have got the bill of lading. If the Government had followed that elementary step, I believe they would have saved vast sums of money. If the House will look at that remarkable Report which has been published—the first Report, I hope, of many of the Finance Committee—they will see that £26,000,000 has been paid for wheat in Australia which is lying in Australia rotting, and I dare say that is included in the £74,000,000. If you take that off, it would make the amount £48,000,000. Immediately anyone says he has got wheat or potatoes the Government say, “We will pay you for them,” and now the Government is in all sorts of difficulties with regard to that wheat bought in Australia.

I suggest to the House that the principle on which the Food Controller and the Government are acting should be seriously reconsidered. There is a feeling arising in the country on this point which it is impossible for the House of Commons long to neglect. The co-operators, a very powerful body, have resolved to take the law into their own hands and make co-operativism a political question, because they are discontented with the way the Government are behaving. The merchants equally in the City of London and in other cities of the country are meeting together to take steps to save the

country from some of the waste and loss which the Government is imposing upon it. I attended a great meeting in the City of London and I tried to find out what it was they were objecting to in the Government policy, and the chief objection they took was to the complete prohibition of imports which the Government had imposed. In a great speech on the 24th February the Prime Minister came down and put a black mark against certain things which were not to be imported. We have had eight or nine months experience, and I say that was a black day for the country. It has produced famine in many respects; it has caused great waste and loss; and, above all things, deprived the Government of the very best assistance. What is that assistance? The assistance of trained, able business men of England in bringing in necessary commodities. This House never discussed that question of the prohibition of imports. It will have to be discussed, because it has been carried to an extent the country never realised. The Government has first control of all British ships and any other ships they like to take. They can take what ships they want, and surely, after they have satisfied their own requirements, it is a very tall order to say, “We will not allow any other ship to come in.” I believe that is one reason why millions on millions have been lost to the country during the eight months by the extreme way in which that policy has been carried out.

The import of China tea and of Java tea was prohibited. What was the result of the prohibition of Java tea? I hear that large quantities were sent to Germany. They were willing to take the food we refused. Then 120,000 tons were sent to Canada. It would have been far better for that tea to come here. The same with the complete prohibition of China tea. What harm would it have done, when the stocks have gone down to nearly one-quarter of what they were a year ago, to allow that tea to come to this country? Then there is timber. I attended a timber meeting the other day, and the complete prohibition of timber and the price to which it has risen have become a serious menace to the industries of this country. The complaint of the merchants in the City of London and all over the country is that the Government are taking complete control of businesses. My right hon. Friend said, “Be patient with the Food Controller.” It is very

hard to be patient with him, because he has made all the difficulties—he, or other members of the Government; I must give him fair play. He blames the Shipping Controller for not bringing in tea. There is no centre of control. There is no way by which to enforce the same policy with regard to everything, and when you go to a Minister he makes an excuse and a charge against another. I say that the prohibition of imports and the complete control of business have shaken the confidence of men of capital throughout the country. My right hon. Friend alluded to the fact that money has been withdrawn from business and is now lying almost wasted in the banks. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Why not put it in War Loan?"] Money will go there if the operations of business are encouraged. It would be better if the Government would allow all that could be done by voluntary effort to be done.

The Food Controller has laid down this principle: He says he is going to give a profit to the grower, a fair profit to the merchant, and a profit to the distributor, and take over the food control. I want the House to watch this principle. Growers have never been guaranteed before, nor have merchants or distributors. They take their chance, and they know if they make mistakes they lose their money. That is why the business of this country is carried on so well. But here we have the Government, that makes every mistake it likes, or almost every mistake, knowing that it has the rich purse of the taxpayer behind it. I want to give one or two illustrations. I see the representative of the Shipping Controller here. I want to call the attention of the House to an illustration as to how easily shipping can be got when anybody makes up his mind to get it. I am glad to see that the Chairman of the Sugar Commission is present, for he would not stand any nonsense about sugar. When he was asked to take charge of it he said, "Will you bring it in and give me eight or nine weeks' stock in reserve?"

Mr. PRINGLE: There is nobody present to reply to all this.

Mr. LOUGH: I do not bother about Ministers coming back, and I do not care whether they reply or not. We get all our sugar from the East, as we get our tea, but we have now 130,000 tons of sugar in stock as against 64,000 tons this day twelve months. My right hon. Friend opposite got the sugar because he put his

foot down. The tea stocks have now run down from 118,000,000 lbs. a year ago to 36,000,000 lbs. now, and that is not good management, and you ought to spare a little in one direction and give it in another in order to provide the necessities of life for the people. Why not bring in more tea instead of dates? Why carry such cargoes instead of bringing more valuable commodities? I suggest that this exaggeration in one direction and neglect in another is imposing great dangers on the people of this country.

All this profiteering which is going on by the Government is very serious, and it is not at all confined to cases of freights. Contracts were made in India after the War for three years, and the shippers fulfilled their contracts, but what have the Government done? The moment they took over the shipping they raised the freight from Calcutta to 300s. per ton, and I think this House ought to demand that an account should be given of these matters, and we ought to know how much profit is being made out of rice and ships, and the rest of it. Whenever we ask a question in regard to these matters we are told that it is not in the public interest to reply. I fail to see why it is not in the public interest. I am sure it would be in the interests of the consumer if more attention was paid to these questions. I was very sorry that a larger number of hon. Members from Ireland did not hear the speech of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dewsbury. The Irish people have now become business people, and I think they are the most happily placed at the present moment of any people in Europe. On the butter question they started an agitation, the result of which was that the Controller's Order was withdrawn and they got a great deal better price.

Mr. JOHN O'CONNOR: The right hon. Gentleman cannot charge us with neglect with regard to the question of butter. Before the Order was issued in October we had been to the Food Controller on that subject, and if anything has happened in regard to the sale of Irish butter it is on account of our action.

Mr. LOUGH: This question has been left by the Government in a most shocking condition. We expected to hear something definite, but we have heard no business statement, and I suggest that the Government have got into all these difficulties by going outside the ordinary

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channels of business, and placing no confidence in those principles of distribution or the law of supply and demand which produces low prices. I think it would be well if the Government secured in all these markets the advice of business men in order to avoid all this scandalous waste at a time when the country is so hardy pressed.

Mr. HUGH LAW: We have had an extremely interesting speech from the right hon. Gentleman who has just sat down, but I am afraid I cannot agree with him that it would be better if prices were left alone during the present crisis.

Mr. LOUGH: I did not go so far as that. I believe there should be a limit.

Mr. LAW: I believe my right hon. Friend agrees that it was necessary to have a guaranteed price fixed in the case of bacon.

Mr. LOUGH: I think not.

Mr. LAW: I think the Minister for Agriculture, in his spirited defence, made out what appeared an entirely convincing case. In the circumstances the country found itself some months ago it was of the highest importance that the agricultural interest should be assured of a certain price in respect of the crop of potatoes. I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman was equally convincing in respect of the other matter upon which he spoke. I do not mean in regard to the fixing of a guaranteed price for potatoes, but with regard to the prohibition which at present exists in reference to the sale of potatoes at a lower price. That is an entirely different matter, and while one must give a good deal of weight to the considerations which the right hon. Gentleman urged I agree with the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Lough) in hoping that the decisions of the Government will not be held in suspense much longer, because nothing is worse in agricultural operations than the existence of a state of uncertainty. I would press very strongly that the Food Controller should make up his mind between the various alternatives indicated by the Minister of Agriculture as soon as possible. I think we should know what they are and we should have an opportunity of dealing with them in detail.

With regard to potatoes I was exceedingly glad to hear the Member for Dewsbury say that he fully recognised that the

guarantee given by the Government in this matter must be kept. The right hon. Gentleman appeared further to suggest that it might be possible to discriminate between one grower and another. I should have thought that that was a process which would prove extremely difficult, and I should be very doubtful indeed whether anything of that kind would prove practical. Until we know a little more as to what is in the mind of both the right hon. Gentleman and the Government, I think we are bound to take the perfectly simple stand that the guarantee as it has been given must be observed. There is one other commodity in regard to which I should like to obtain a little information, both as to the price fixed and the supply.

Mr. MOLTEÑO: The hon. Member is addressing the House on a matter connected with agriculture and the question of potatoes. There is no representative of the Board of Agriculture on the Treasury Bench, and in these circumstances shall I be in order in moving to report Progress until someone representing the Board of Agriculture can attend?

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Sir Donald Maclean): I hope the hon. Member will not press that point, because the Minister for Agriculture was present during the Debate and until a short time ago.

Mr. PRINGLE: And he left before the Speaker had finished.

Mr. MACPHERSON: The representative of the Ministry of Shipping was prepared to deal with the points raised by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dewsbury. The President of the Board of Agriculture has been here during the Debate, but he has just been sent for.

Mr. LAW: The point I am coming to does not directly concern the Minister for Agriculture unless he is prepared to answer for the Food Controller, and my point is a matter within the province of the Food Controller. I should like to know, because I have some doubt whether there is any member of the Government present who is prepared to answer for the Food Controller.

Mr. DEVLIN: I moved the Adjournment of the Debate.

Mr. PRINGLE: I desire to support the Motion that has just been made by my hon. Friend. The manner in which the

Government is treating the House is nothing short of disgraceful. We are here on the second day of the discussion of a Vote for an immense sum of money for the purposes of the War. We have been over two hours this afternoon dealing with one of the most vital subjects relating to the successful prosecution of the War, namely, the supplies of this country and the price of them, and during a great portion of the Debate there has not been a single responsible Member of the Government present on that Bench to deal with any of the criticisms or to answer any of the questions which have been put by hon. Members. [HON. MEMBERS: "Divide!"] I am quite willing to divide, but I think it is fair to state the opposition. The Government may think they have to deal with an indifferent House of Commons, but they will very soon find that they have not to deal with an indifferent people, and when we come to a state of things which is inevitable in a very few months they will have to face a serious reckoning. I hope that my hon. Friend will go to a Division.

Major E. WOOD: I hope that the House will not insist on going to a Division. There are a great many important subjects that Members wish to discuss, and it seems to many of us that it would be a great waste of time. If I am in order, I should like to give an instance of the kind of subject that a good many of us want to have discussed as a reason for not accepting the Motion to adjourn the Debate. It is a subject in which I am personally extremely interested and upon which I think I speak, I might almost say without exception, for all the officers and men serving in France at the present moment. It is the question of officers and men being transferred out of their own units and posted to other units.

Mr. DEVLIN: On the point of Order. As I understand it, the question before the House is "That the Debate be now adjourned," on the ground that several most important speeches dealing with matters of most vital interest have been delivered, and that all the Ministers and sub-Ministers have been absent from the House. I take it that is the question before the House, and I would ask for your ruling upon the point.

Major WOOD: I am not responsible, of course, for answering for Ministers. I was only giving an example of a subject which I regard as more important than a

formal protest against Ministers for something which has more or less since been rectified.

Mr. BONAR LAW: I really do not think that the hon. Member for West Belfast (Mr. Devlin) would have made the interruption that he has just made if he had been present to hear the important speeches to which he refers. They must have been those of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Runciman) and of my right hon. Friend who sits opposite (Mr. Lough). The Minister for Agriculture was not only here, but he answered the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dewsbury, and he listened to the whole of the speech of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Islington (Mr. Lough).

Mr. PRINGLE: No; he left the House.

Mr. BONAR LAW: He listened to nearly the whole of it. It is obvious—I was going to say to every fair-minded Member of the House, but I will assume that everyone is fair-minded—that no Minister of the Crown can be sure of being able to spend the whole time in the House of Commons when it is dealing with any particular subject. As it appears, the Minister for Agriculture has had to leave, but he will be back very soon, and, if anything new had been said in connection with this subject, there would certainly have been an answer given to it from this bench. I would also appeal to the House on this point. We are obviously at a great disadvantage, because the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food is ill and is not here to speak for his Department. In these circumstances we had arranged, so far as it was possible, that the Minister for Agriculture should take his place, and he has done so. There are a great many other subjects which the House wishes to discuss, and we are prepared to deal with all of them. If there is any desire to continue the food discussion further, and if anything new should be said requiring an answer, an answer will certainly be given to the best of our ability. I would remind the House that it must in fairness take into account that at a time like this, however important our duties in the House of Commons are, there are occasionally other engagements which arise and which it is not possible for us to avoid. So far as I am concerned, I was in the House during the earlier speeches and during part of that

[Mr. Bonar Law.]
of my right hon. Friend, and I have come back as soon as it was possible for me to do so. I hope under these circumstances that my hon. Friends will not persist in the Motion.

Mr. DEVLIN: Of course, I at once accede to the request the right hon. Gentleman has made, but I ought to say that in moving the Adjournment of the Debate I was not altogether influenced by the absence of Ministers on this occasion. The right hon. Gentleman is well aware that on several other occasions I and other Members of the House have protested against the absence of so many Ministers and so many Under-Secretaries from the House. Sometimes when matters of the most vital importance are being discussed, there is not a single individual on that Bench. The other night when several Members from Ireland were speaking—and we have not occupied much of the time of the House—we had practically to stop the Debate on the Irish question because of the absence of any Minister. I moved this Motion as a further protest against the way the House of Commons is being treated. I have no objection whatever to the right hon. Gentleman and to the War Cabinet deciding to suspend Parliamentary sittings altogether if they choose to do so, but we ought not to go through the perfunctory performance of calling the representatives of the people here and then having their proceedings treated with contempt.

Motion, "That the Debate be now adjourned," by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. H. LAW: It will be recognised that my hon. Friend has some ground for making his Motion, but I trust the Minister for Agriculture will realise that so far as I am concerned I make no complaint whatever of his absence, which I am sure was perfectly necessary. I was about to deal with a subject which while closely cognate is not, so far as I know, directly within his purview. I hope I may take it that the Minister for Agriculture, though he cannot give an answer now, will inform the representative of the Food Controller on the points which more properly relate to him.

Mr. PROTHERO indicated assent.

Mr. LAW: The particular matter upon which I was about to speak probably interests Ireland and the West of Ireland in particular more than any other part of

the United Kingdom. I refer to maize, a commodity which I believe was little used in this country until a very short time ago and which even now is bought, as the Food Controller's price indicates, only by the pound, whereas in the West of Ireland even the poorest people are accustomed to buy what they call Indian meal not by the pound or even by the stone, but by the hundredweight and sometimes by the ton. I am sorry that one has to raise a question of this sort at a time when the Parliamentary Secretary is ill, but our opportunities are very few, and we must take such opportunities as present themselves. I should like to know, in the first place, why it is that the Food Controller should have fixed the price of maize as he has done. He has fixed it at 3½d. per lb. That is extraordinary, from an Irish point of view, for two reasons. It is extraordinary in the first place because of the unit taken, the pound. One would much more naturally expect the price to have been fixed per stone, per hundredweight, or even per ton. Secondly, it is most extraordinary, because the price at the time it was fixed was far in advance of anything that had ever been paid in the remotest parts of the country. Unless my arithmetic is worse than I know it to be, 3½d. per lb. means 4s. 1d. per stone. Indian meal before the War was ordinarily sold in the remotest parts of the congested districts of Ireland, where you have to carry it for enormous distances, first by ship, then by rail, and ultimately by cart, at anything from 9d. to 1s. per stone, so that you have actually jumped from an average price of 10d. to the price sanctioned by the Food Controller of 4s. 1d., or considerably over four times more. That needs some justification, because I am informed it is quite beyond anything that the trade expected. At the very time that the price was fixed the commodity was being sold at several shillings per ton less than the price which was determined by the Food Controller. That is the first point to which I really think that some attention should be paid.

The Minister for Agriculture, I am sure, will realise that it is a matter of the very greatest importance to the very poorest of the people in the country. It is not only used for feeding-stuffs for cattle, pigs, and so on, but all over the West of Ireland, when potatoes get scarce in the spring, it is the common food, as porridge, of thousands of families. There is nothing upon which people rely so much

as upon this commodity. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that the price should be as reasonable as possible. There is only one thing more important than the price, and that is the supply. I quite realise how enormously these two matters are related. I want to know if the Government can tell us what supplies of maize there are at the present time. I wish they could give us some indication of the present state and of future prospects, because I notice that there are one or two things which are perfectly alarming. Only the other day Sir Arthur Yapp signalised his appointment to some office or other in the Ministry of Food by recommending people to serve their country by mixing more maize in their afternoon tea cakes. One would have assumed that before advice of that sort was given, the distinguished gentleman in question had ascertained that the commodity he recommended for use was actually

6.0 P.M. obtainable. I confess to some doubt whether that is really

the case, because I remember what happened six or eight months ago. At that time the papers were full of recommendations to people to use maize to a greater extent in this country, in order to save flour. I am told that many millionaires felt that they were doing great service to their country by buying pounds or half-pounds of maize in order to mix it in afternoon tea cakes. The papers were full of receipts for maize puddings, maize cakes, maize this and maize that; yet at the very same time—I see the Chief Secretary for Ireland in his place; he will remember the incident—I had begun to receive the most bitter complaints from my own part of Donegal that this very commodity could not be obtained at all there, where they did not need to be told how to use it, and did not need people to deliver lectures in order to induce them to make use of it. I went all through my division, and found that the complaints were absolutely justified. The Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture also came and satisfied himself. Potatoes at that time were done in the poorer districts, oatmeal was 6s. 6d. a stone, and quite beyond the reach of the poor, while Indian or maize meal was absolutely unprocurable. Thereupon I asked a number of people in different places, "What on earth are the people living upon?" and the answer I received was, "They are eating more bread." The very flour which people

here were being asked to save by eating maize was the cheapest and most plentiful commodity which these people, who had been accustomed to eating maize all their lives, were forced to obtain in order to supply the lack of the very commodity which the Food Controller was recommending as a substitute for flour. When I see the repeated recommendation of the further use of this meal, I am not as convinced as I might be that there is a plentiful stock. The matter is of the greatest importance from every point of view to the people in the West of Ireland, and if the Ministry of Food is able to give us some information as to the state of the supplies, and also as to the reasons for fixing the price at the very high point they have done, I shall be very glad.

Mr. PRINGLE: I wish to refer to the subject which was the main topic in the speech of the President of the Board of Agriculture. He is always listened to with interest and with sympathy by the House, but seldom has the right hon. Gentleman made a speech more unsatisfactory in its character than the reply he gave this afternoon to my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Runciman). The question of the price of potatoes is one that has been before the House since we assembled after the Autumn Recess. On the first day of re-assembling, questions began to be put as to the Government's policy, as to the Orders which they were issuing and as to the enforcement of those Orders. During the whole of that period it has been absolutely impossible to obtain any clear or satisfactory answer from the Government. Questions have been put by hon. Members for Ireland and hon. Members for Scotland, as well as by those from England, and in every case we have been treated to more than usually evasive answers from the Government. When endeavours were made to explore those evasive answers given here by the mouthpiece of the Food Control Department, we were always informed that the hon. Gentleman who had the misfortune to speak for the Department had no connection with it and that we must await the return of the Parliamentary Secretary. We, of course, sympathise deeply with the Parliamentary Secretary in his illness, but considering the large number of Members the present Government has in this House, surely it was possible for them, during the Parliamentary Secretary's illness, to arrange for an efficient substitute to be here who

[Mr. Pringle.]

could give a reasonable answer to the questions put by hon. Members. We have therefore, waited until this Debate on the Vote of Credit in the hope that at last we should have a clear declaration of the Government's policy, but the President of the Board of Agriculture has been as vague in his speech to-day as the hon. Gentleman who, in the past, has answered on behalf of the Food Control Department.

Certain definite questions were put to him by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dewsbury. First of all, he was asked whether the existing Order in relation to potatoes was to be enforced, and whether or not every farmer or every potato dealer who sells potatoes now at a price lower than £6 per ton is to be prosecuted and held to have committed a criminal offence. We have had no answer to those questions. We should receive an answer in the course of this Debate. Is the Order constituting the sale of potatoes at less than £6 a ton intended to be enforced or is it merely waste paper? It is no use putting forth Orders, fixing penalties and threatening men with fines and imprisonment, if there is no intention on the part of the Government—and there never has been any intention on the part of the Government—to enforce the Orders and to impose the penalties stated in them, because if you issue Orders which are never intended to be enforced you are bringing the whole law into contempt, and the same indifference will be extended to other Orders which it is of vital interest that the Government should enforce and the penalties which should be inflicted upon the transgressor. Is it to be done? We have been told that there are cases where the farmers have deliberately evaded the Order and have openly and flagrantly sold potatoes at much lower prices. Are the Government intending to prosecute those men? The President of the Board of Agriculture told us that it was quite impossible for men to grow potatoes at a profit at less than £6 per ton. That was the effect of his argument. He worked out a calculation that it cost from £36 to £40 per acre to grow potatoes, that if you got £6 per acre, then at £6 per ton a man was not getting any real profit; consequently it was impossible to sell at £4 10s. per ton. Here you have men, who cannot grow them at less than £6 a ton, coming into the market as philanthropists in a time of food scarcity and offering them at £1 10s. per ton less than the Gov-

ernment say they can, while the Government are making this kind of philanthropy a criminal offence. Do they mean what they say in their Orders or do they not? That question has not been answered. The only statement we have had to-day or at any other time has been that the Government's guarantee is to be performed. They have left the matter absolutely vague as to what they mean by performing the guarantee. There is another question I should like to ask: Do the Government intend to make up the balance to the farmer who sells at less than £6 a ton; in other words, are they going to compensate the man who commits a criminal offence according to their own Order? We are entitled to an answer on both of these points.

Apart from these questions, which are solely questions regarding the ridiculous and absurd position in which the Government have landed themselves by this foolish Order, there are very substantial questions at issue affecting the food which is to be available for the people of this country. It is obviously of the utmost importance, in view of the necessities of the coming months, that the Government should see that all the available supplies are used in the best and most economical way. Personally, I hold that when you have a surplus of any commodity, that commodity will be best distributed if it is left to the interests of the men who are to distribute it or to the producer. It is only where you have a scarcity that the Government should interfere with the distribution of any articles of importance in this country. It is a mistake to worry so much, as we have worried, about prices. Prices are a matter of relatively very small account. The thing we have to consider is an adequate supply. We have been told to interfere against profiteering. A great deal of nonsense has been talked about profiteering. We have landed ourselves in this position, that the Government is the last and the worst of all profiteers. It has not been a question of prices; it has been a question of scarcity. This question of scarcity is going to become more and more urgent as every week and month passes by. Here we have, in one very important commodity, a considerable surplus and you are deliberately preventing the people of this country from reaping the benefit of that surplus. You are preventing them from enjoying the advantages of plenty—a most extraordinary position to be in. Mark you! this affects the poorest

of the people, because the potato is of more consequence to the poorest classes of our consumers than almost any other article of food. Yet you are deliberately robbing the poor of all the advantages of the bounty of Providence. That is the great question to which the Government should address themselves. You are in the position at the present time that you have to face a scarcity of cereals—a scarcity not only in this country, but a world scarcity. We are going to be stinted very largely because we have had to divert supplies that were available for ourselves to our Allies in France and Italy. In view of that situation it is the duty of the Government to make available, as far as they possibly can, every useful substitute for those cereals. What are they doing? At the very moment when it is advisable to do this, the Government is artificially raising the price of the commodity. It is, therefore, in a word, discouraging the consumption of an article which is plentiful, and at the same time encouraging the consumption of an article of which there is a scarcity. That is the real effect of their action in regard to potatoes. You have subsidiary effects. When you have potatoes at £6 a ton, it is not profitable to use potatoes as a substitute for Government flour. The Government, consequently, has to supply more and more of that flour for the purpose of making bread, and for every quarter of that flour which it is supplying it has to give a subsidy. Consequently, by preventing the using of potatoes as a substitute for flour, it is causing an extra drain on the Treasury in respect of the subsidy which is payable in order to keep bread at 9d. for the 4 lb. loaf. That is a most absurd position, and one which it is obvious the Government ought to get out of as quickly as possible. We are told by the President of the Board of Agriculture that the Government is still considering it. This Order was brought into force about the 16th of September. That is only six weeks ago. It has been brought forward day after day in this House, but the Government is still considering it. Twelve months ago, when this Government came into office, we were told that it was not going to be a Government which would be considering things. There would be an end of "wait and see." But the old familiar dialect was the only language we could hear from the right hon. Gentleman this afternoon. His whole plea, in fact, was "wait and see."

This undoubtedly is an urgent question, because by general admission there is a large quantity of the present crop of potatoes which may go to waste and be ruined unless something is done. It is to be ruined unless the Government price of £6 a ton is realised. Surely, in view of the threatened scarcity such a position is absolutely indefensible. Let the food which is available have free course to the people, and let those who have produced and who are distributing it sell it at what they consider a reasonable profit.

But whilst this potato matter calls for immediate decision, there are other matters in relation to supplies to which the House should demand that the Government should direct its attention. There is the general question of supplies. We hear a great deal outside the House about food economy. The former director of food economy, the hon. Member (Mr. K. Jones), gave up his office in a blaze of glory about midsummer, when we were told that his job was done, that the campaign had succeeded, and that economy need no more be preached to the people of this country. After he had quitted the office which he had so efficiently discharged, we had an extremely optimistic speech from the Prime Minister in reply to the late Director of Food Economy, and the significant thing about it was that it was more optimistic than the speech of the late Director of Food Economy. What is the situation now? We have another Director of Food Economy, and we are going over the old ground of meetings, leaflets, and newspaper advertisements. Is this going to be sufficient? Undoubtedly we are going now to be face to face with a situation such as this country has not had to face before, and the Government has not been honest with the country about it. It is all very well to conceal facts from the enemy. We have had too much suppression of truth in this country on the ground that to divulge the fact would be helping the enemy. After three years of war we might have outgrown that. We may always be pretty sure that the enemy Governments are better informed regarding the facts than the people of this country.

It is more important now, especially when this question of shortage is going to come home to everyone, that a clean breast should be made of it by the Government, and that necessary steps should be taken. I have always been an oppo-

[Mr. Pringle.]

ment of Government interference in regard to trade and commerce and the sale and production of commodities. I believe the Government does badly in all these things. I believe you should not interfere with these things unless under the pressure of necessity. But when you are face to face with a shortage I believe the only remedy is Government interference. When you come face to face with shortage it is of urgent importance, not only that the Government should interfere, but that it should interfere in time. We have had threats of rationing for a long time. Before the late Government fell a section of this House, which is now absorbed in the present Government, and with which the present Prime Minister had great sympathy, advocated rationing, although there was no need for it—although it was only a question of prices. Now, when they are there, when the necessity is urgent and when not a moment is to be lost, they are dallying with it. I quite agree that the Government has many important and difficult problems to consider. The present situation of the country, in all its complexities and difficulties, is one which would be too heavy almost for any body of men to bear, and that it may be difficult for the War Cabinet, having military and naval and other concerns to absorb their attention, to give that consideration to these domestic questions, which, however, are also war questions, which they deserve.

But if it is impossible for the War Cabinet, with all the serious and grave problems which are now absorbing its attention, to deal with these questions of supplies and to consider them as they ought to be considered, it should delegate to another body of Members of the House what may be called a dictatorship—not a dictatorship as we have had it in the past. We have had a Controller of Food, a Controller of Shipping, a Controller of Coal, a Controller of Agriculture, and so on, all working in watertight compartments and very often working against each other. We have had evidence of that in speeches which have been made from that bench. For example, I should doubt very much whether there has been complete harmony between the President of the Board of Agriculture and the Food Controller on this question of the minimum price of potatoes. In these circumstances you have had delays and indecision, which have had the most painful results in the past.

Surely, instead of having all these isolated, irresponsible Controllers working by themselves, without any co-ordinative authority, you should have some body, associated with the Government, which will settle disputes between them and come to decisions and not have their conflicts and disputes relegated to a quite overburdened body like the War Cabinet. I think this an eminently reasonable and timely suggestion under present conditions. I put it forward in the interests of the Government, because I believe that this question of the careful husbanding of our supplies in the coming months is going to be a vital factor in the prosecution of the War. The Leader of the House, as well as other members of the War Cabinet, has said that this War is going to be a question of nerve. It is going to be a question as to which group of belligerent Powers is going to stay it out. There is nothing which will determine this question of nerve more than, first of all, the food supplies of the different groups of belligerents; and, secondly, the sense entertained by the people of the different countries as to whether their resources are being wisely husbanded and wisely distributed. In other words, I believe the root question which will determine the nerve and the staying power of Great Britain, which is the key of the Allies, is the sense among the people that there has been wisdom and prudence on the part of their governors in husbanning the national resources; and, secondly, justice in their distribution amongst all classes.

Mr. MOLTENO: I have been listening to the Debate from the point of view of the farmer to see what guidance he can get in the conduct of his affairs, and I have not been able to gather even yet any useful information from the statements which have been made by the Government. The President of the Board of Agriculture told us of the very great difficulty under which he is in handling this matter. We all realise that it is a very difficult question. I have no complaint to make about fixing the price of £6 per ton for potatoes. When the guarantee was given, looking at the enormous cost of growing potatoes at that time, it was essential in the interests of the food supply of this country, as a war measure, that some guarantee should be given. Therefore, I have no quarrel with the Government in giving a guarantee of £6 a ton. But I want to make an appeal to the President to have greater sympathy

with the farmer in the position in which he is now placed. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has given the farmer the advice that he should not grow and sell his potatoes, but that he should just wait. I want to examine that for a moment. What is the history of this question? The guarantee was announced in a speech by the Prime Minister on 23rd February last, and ever since then there has been an attempt to elicit from the Government what they meant by it. Everyone realised that it was a difficult question. No one knew how that guarantee was going to be applied, and in order that the Government might not relegate the question to a time when it would be too late, or had become embarrassing to the farmer, questions were put from time to time, but no clear and definite answer could be got. That course of action has led to extreme suspicion and difficulty for the farmer. See what happened. The guarantee given in February, although an absolute guarantee, was not allowed to apply. It was put off until 15th September. When 15th September came, the farmer got an Order which made it penal for him to sell his potatoes under £6 a ton free on rail. Apparently that was the method of carrying out the guarantee of the Government. I want to show what that means to a farmer in Scotland, we will say, whose market is in England. The effect of that flat rate on him is that he cannot sell at all at this price until all the farmers nearer to the market have sold their potatoes, because his potatoes have to pay so much higher railway rates. What is the effect of that? As the President of the Board of Agriculture knows perfectly well, farmers who grow second early potatoes do so for immediate consumption when they are raised. When they are taken out of the ground they are not put into the pit, but go into the market at once, because they are not a class of potato which will keep or are intended to be kept. The Chancellor of the Exchequer says that the farmers must wait. But the farmer has to conduct his business under great difficulty, and that particular farmer has never made provision for storing his potatoes—in fact, his potatoes would not keep if he did store them. What is he to do? How can he wait as he is told to do by the Chancellor of the Exchequer? I put it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and to the President of the Board of Agriculture that the farmer has to carry on from day to day.

He cannot defer his operations. He must go on. There is only one time, and that is the right time, in farming to do certain things. Therefore, it is no answer for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to say that he must wait. I strongly urge upon the Chancellor and the President of the Board of Agriculture that they should at length come to a decision. Difficult as the question is, it ought to be decided at once. It is not fair to the farmer to leave him in this quandary, and I make an earnest appeal that he should no longer be left in doubt. Let the farmers know what they are to do. They are most anxious to do everything the Government require them to do. They have done everything, and put forward their best efforts, and the Government having got a good result, it is not fair to put the farmers in this position of uncertainty and difficulty, which is leading to loss and will lead to a very large destruction of valuable food which we need.

I want to put another question to the President of the Board of Agriculture and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Shipping. I want to relate my personal experience in regard to the question of freights in its effect on agricultural machinery. I will give my personal experience, because I think it is typical of what is going on everywhere. If you are to cultivate more land you must have more implements. I wrote to the greatest makers in this country of ploughs and other agricultural implements. They replied, "We have already thousands and thousands of orders on our books which we cannot fulfil. If you like, we will put your name down, but as to delivery we can give you no date whatever." I go to the importers of machines and say, "Can you supply me with machinery?" How do they answer? The first answer is, "The Government have not made up their minds on this question. We have been waiting for their decision for a very long time, and had hoped to have it long before this, but we have not got it." The makers say to me, "We would import this machinery at once, but what is our position? We have to pay a freight on these bulky implements running from 1½ dollars to 1¾ dollars, or from 6s. to 7s. per cubic foot. If the Government would allow us to use the commandeered rate of 1s. per cubic foot, we should import these machines at once; but to import agricultural machines, which are of a very bulky nature, and pay

[Mr. Molteno.]

6s. or 7s. per cubic foot freight means that they would be landed here at a price which nobody would pay." I do urge upon the Government that they should take this situation in hand. They have asked us to plough up more land, and we are doing it, and we have done our best up to the present, but the ordinary supply of agricultural implements in this country will not suffice. If you tell us to plough up new land, grass land, and so forth, we must have more machinery imported to enable us to do it, but under the conditions which prevail you cannot import it. I do not know why there should be these enormous freight charges to prevent the importation of this machinery which is so essential if you are going to succeed in getting more land ploughed up. It may be that there are no ships. I do not know. At any rate, it is useless to tell us to make use of all the resources of this country if you will not supply us with the means of doing so.

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the MINISTRY of SHIPPING (Sir Leo Chiozza Money): My hon. Friend (Mr. Molteno) has raised a point of very great importance, which was also dealt with by the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Runciman) and the right hon. Member for Islington (Mr. Lough). I am going to give reasons which have compelled the Ministry of Shipping to advance freights. It is not surprising that the House as a whole is deeply interested in these rates, and I am glad to have this opportunity of explaining why it has been necessary to deal with these costs. The charge has been made against the Minister of Shipping, not obscurely, that it has been profiteering. By profiteering I have always understood you mean the making of undue profit by a private individual out of the exigencies of war. Surely if that is a proper definition, as I think it is, even if it were true that the Ministry of Shipping were advancing charges in order to make its accounts better, I hardly think that the term "profiteering" as commonly understood would apply to our operations, because it is obvious that whatever profits arise in that way would be profits which would pass into the Treasury and would go in relief of taxation. But I am not seeking to defend such a course as that. I do not think anybody would have the audacity to rise from this Bench and defend a system of government

by which a Department such as that I have the honour to represent would advance charges with a view to indirectly taxing the consumers of the country.

Mr. HOUSTON: That is in fact what it is.

Sir CHIOZZA MONEY: I will come to an examination of the facts of the case. Freights have been raised; that is a fact. Why have they been raised? The reason seems the more puzzling to those making an examination of the question when they remember that what we pay to the shipowner in the case, let us say, of a requisitioned liner, is the arbitration rate commonly called the Blue Book rate. The question may be asked, If that is all you are paying to the shipowner, how is it you are advancing freights? It has to be remembered that the arbitration which decided the Blue Book rates, while they gave the shipowner a constant payment, did not confer upon the Government the privilege of bearing a constant cost, because the payment to the shipowner is only one of the charges which has to be borne by the Government in this matter. Let me name a few of the other charges which are of the very greatest importance. The first, of course, is the cost of bunkering coal. That is a charge which is borne by the Government and not by the shipowner. The cost of bunkering has risen enormously and constantly. Then again, under the Blue Book arrangement, as it is commonly called, the Government bears the whole of that part of wages which represents an advance upon pre-war rates. What were the pre-war rates of wages, and what are the wages at the present time? Broadly speaking, the cash wages of the able seaman at the present time are twice what they were when the War broke out. I am perfectly sure that no right hon. or hon. Gentleman grudges the advances that have been made to the seamen, with the authority of the Ministry of Shipping. So far as I could tell during the Prime Minister's speech in moving the Resolution of thanks on Monday to the Army, Navy, and Auxiliary Forces who have taken an active part in the War, there were no cheers more hearty than those which greeted his reference to the sailors of the Mercantile Marine. I am glad to think that, pending the work of the National Wages Board, which is being set up under the authority of the Ministry of Shipping, to deal with all these questions of wages and conditions in our

Mercantile Marine, an interim rate of £11 per month for the able seamen has been arrived at, pending a general decision. That, of course, has got to be borne by His Majesty's Government in so far as it represents an increase on the pre-war rates.

I come now to the question of war risks. The formation of the Ministry of Shipping almost exactly coincided with the prosecution of the intensive submarine campaign by the enemy. That campaign began in February, and the Ministry of Shipping was formed at the end of December. The consequence of that intensive submarine campaign has been an enormous increase in the losses of our ships, and that has led, of course, to a correspondingly enormous increase in the rates of insurance.

Mr. HOUSTON: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he forgets that prior to that, last year, the rate of insurance in the Mediterranean was ten guineas per voyage, and as the voyage may have been completed in a month it was equal to a rate of £120 per annum, and the shipowners were bearing that.

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: The hon. Member quotes a particular case; but I am dealing with the general case of insurance, and I can assure him that I speak nothing more than the truth when I say that the rate of insurance has increased enormously since the Ministry of Shipping has been in operation, and that item alone has meant a very great increase in Government cost. We have been faced with the problem of meeting constantly increasing costs. The criticism which might be advanced against the Government is not that we have raised freights now, or that we have raised them too soon; but I can imagine someone getting up and saying, "Why did not you raise them before?" Because the losses that were being incurred and are being incurred on voyages now current are of an extraordinary character. Let me give a few cases which I think will convince my hon. Friend of the truth of what I am saying. I have a few cases here of accounts which we have obtained from the owners of cargo liners. They are pro forma accounts it is true, but there they are. I will take the case of an Australian steamer. The war insurance charges, which have become current during the lifetime of the Ministry of Shipping, have increased from £27,775 to £50,000.

Mr. HOUSTON: On one voyage?

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: Yes.

Mr. HOUSTON rose—

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: If I exchange words with the hon. Member when I am dealing with a matter of this kind, I shall not make myself clear to the House.

Mr. HOUSTON: You must not mislead the House.

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: I will endeavour not to do that. With regard to this particular ship, on this particular voyage, which was a round voyage, the pro forma account shows a loss on that voyage of £73,850.

Sir W. RUNCIMAN: How long did the voyage take?

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: It is a round Australian voyage. The hon. Member knows that it would take about three months in normal times. It might take ten or eleven months at the present time.

Sir OWEN PHILIPPS: Can the hon. Member tell us how much of the cargo carried by that vessel was carried at fixed low rates—pre-war rates.

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: If my hon. Friends will allow me to deal with the point in order, I shall try to make myself clear. I am dealing now with the actual losses shown by the actual accounts obtained from the owners of ships for the purpose of investigating this particular subject. Surely this was the very best way to go to work. We knew that losses were being incurred. What was the proper thing to do? We went to the owners of these vessels and obtained from them accounts relating to typical cases. I can give other cases of loss, some higher and some lower. I have here the case of a refrigerating steamer in the South American trade, and the loss was £27,273. In another case there was a loss of £19,724 on the round voyage, and in other cases in the same trade there were losses of £28,000, £33,000, and £30,000, and so I might go on multiplying illustrations indefinitely.

Sir W. RUNCIMAN rose—

Mr. SPEAKER: It is impossible to conduct a Debate if we have these constant interruptions.

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: I hope that the hon. Member will allow me to put the case to the House in my own language. It was the knowledge of these losses that led us to make this investigation, and the new freights which have been made for Government stores imported into this country have not been based on anything else but this investigation, and the endeavour has been made to arrange figures to cover cost and no more. I know one authority in this matter who thinks that we have not raised the figure quite high enough to cover cost, and the House will easily understand that it is quite possible for quite good opinions to vary in this matter because of the extremely varied character of the factors concerned. In any case, we are going to revise these figures within six months. If we see good cause we shall revise them before the termination of the six months. If the Admiralty is able to secure any further fall in the losses due to submarine attacks—as the House knows already there has been a very happy fall in that direction—then obviously these freight rates will be reduced. Meantime, it is our plain duty just to charge the cost as far as the costs can be obtained in a businesslike manner by business methods. In that connection I may say, in reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, that it is a business method. We were concerned in the arrangement of these particular matters—

Mr. LOUGH: Will the hon. Gentleman deal with the case quoted?

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: I hope to deal with that in due course. These new rates are based upon expenses, upon an examination of voyage accounts. I hope that it will be possible, as I have indicated, to lower rates in the near future. Meantime, it is not the duty of the Ministry of Shipping to carry on with a big debit on freight accounts in order to make an artificial bounty for other Government Departments, or to create a bounty even for the general consumer. If the Government desire to give a bounty for the general consumer, as indeed they have done straightforwardly in the case of the loaf, the way to do it is certainly not to lower freights below the actual cost of conveying the goods. Now the point arises which was referred to by one of my hon. Friends opposite with regard to the control of uncontrolled commodities. I think that it will be plain to the House

that it would be exceedingly unwise for the Government to extend the policy of carrying goods at cost price to commodities the supply of which is not properly and indeed completely, or nearly completely, controlled by the Government. I want to make it plain that these freights to which I am referring are rates for the carriage of Government stores. They cover the whole of the cereal supplies of the country, practically the whole of the meat supplies of the country, and so on. They cover something like 85 or 90 per cent. of the articles imported into this country at the present time. So that it is true to say that, so far as it is humanly possible to do it, from 85 to 90 per cent. of the imports into this country are carried at cost.

Mr. HOUSTON: Or less—considerably less.

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: Or less in some cases. As I have explained, there has been a little lagging in this matter. There are now cases where goods are being carried at a loss, and yet the Ministry of Shipping has been accused in this House of profiteering. The very reverse is the case, but there is no desire to confer a bounty on other Departments. I remember in the old days, long before I was connected with the Ministry of Shipping, saying it would be a most unwise thing merely to transfer profit from the shipowner to the merchant or the producer. At a time when freights were high what was the use of an individual shipowner or a group of shipowners lowering freights merely to make a present to the foreign producer or merchant trader? This same consideration obtains now with regard to Blue Book rates. If we extend the carrying at cost to privately controlled supplies at a time when, as everybody knows, these supplies are extremely short, it is merely taking money out of the pockets of the shipowner in order to present it, sometimes to the middlemen at home and sometimes to the middleman or to the producers abroad. Therefore, in the case of uncontrolled supplies we consider it to be our duty, and I hope the House will agree with us, to charge the market rate, to authorise shipowners to charge market rates, for the carriage of these goods, for if we did not do that the advantage of cost of carrying at cost would certainly not reach those whom we should desire to benefit. I have dealt with the general case. My right hon.

Friend mentioned the case of tea. Unfortunately, his question about tea was not reached in time for me to read the answer to the House to-day. But it is the case that the new freight rate on Northern tea does not represent, as he thinks it does, a large profit to the Ministry of Shipping. I have had it calculated in reply to his question, and I find that it is very little indeed above the actual cost of carrying the tea, and that the difference is represented by less than one-fifth of a penny per lb., and I hope that under the new arrangement, which is being made by the Food Controller, for the control of tea, we shall be able to extend the whole benefit of carriage at cost to tea, but in doing so I assure my right hon. Friend that it will make very little difference in the figure which he has quoted.

Mr. LOUGH: You told me that the difference was something like two pence half-penny per lb. It was in the hands of the shipowner. That was in July.

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: My right hon. Friend refers to the difference between the carriage of tea from Calcutta and from Colombo, but that was because there was an old contract running to which my right hon. Friend referred in Debate, which contract at present prices would be a dead loss either to the shipowner or to the Government if it were continued. That is why it could not be continued. If we continued it, we should be giving a bounty. It was not our duty to do so. I know that there was a big advance on the old rate, which represented a big loss on the carriage of tea at the present prices. That is the answer to the question. That is why it could not be continued. We could not extend the bounty to carriage. As has been mentioned to-day, arrangements are being made to increase tea stocks I hope that in a very short time from now the position will be very considerably improved on. In reference to this question, Why did less tea come in in recent months? I would ask, Is the answer creditable to the Ministry of Shipping? I think not. We were faced, in connection with shipping, with what my hon. and learned Friend called the husbanding of our economic resources. What was the way to husband our ships when every week saw us with fewer ships than the week before, and every week saw us with the need for more commodities at a time when the War was extending its boundaries and always calling for more

men and more supplies? How were we to husband our ships in circumstances like these? The method that we adopted was that of purchasing goods as far as they could be purchased in the markets nearest to this country and diverting ships from long voyages to shorter voyages in order that the carrying power of those ships might be multiplied again and again. It was multiplied again and again, and the very ships that might have brought tea for my right hon. Friend from India, instead of bringing a ton of tea from India were bringing two and a half tons or more of wheat from nearer markets and enabling us to build up in this country a stock of bread—I will not say large enough—but a stock of bread such as we never before possessed, which exists in this country at the present time because of that husbanding of our resources and because of that diversion of ships which led to a decrease in the importation of tea. I can only ask my right hon. Friend to remember that, to look upon the matter broadly, and to acknowledge that there was good reason for the diversions that were made and good reason for the building up of these stocks.

Mr. RUNCIMAN: The right hon. Gentleman has made a very interesting statement. Before he leaves that branch of the subject, does he say that the difference between Blue Book rates and the bill of lading rates, which, of course, is the difference which has added to the cost of commodities, is entirely made up of the extra expenses which he has quoted?

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: It is entirely made up of those extra expenses. In the case of wheat—

Mr. RUNCIMAN: Does that apply equally to privately-owned food which is imported here—take butter, for instance?

Sir L. CHIOZZA MONEY: I am afraid that I must ask for a notice of that question as to the adjustment of accounts of that character, but with regard to wheat and all actually controlled foods, the effect of the arrangement made is that the consumer pays the bare cost as far as it can be ascertained of the commodities. There is only one other thing which I desire to say very briefly in reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington. It has to do with the restriction of imports. I was rather sorry to hear what my right hon. Friend said. Occupying as he does a position of re-

[Sir L. Chiozza Money.]

sponsibility his words go far, and I was sorry to hear him refer to the occasion of the restriction on imports, which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last February, as a black day in the history of England. Really, I would ask my right hon.

7.0 P.M. Friend to reconsider what he said in that connection, and, if he has an opportunity of speaking again on the subject, I hope he will not spread abroad the conception which he has put before us. The restriction of imports takes place quite automatically, because, as we progress so far in this War, we have fewer ships to conduct the War, and the restriction of imports comes about because fewer imports can be brought in. What is the meaning of the Government restriction of imports? It is that you continue some imports and not others, and the effect of the policy which was announced by the Prime Minister, of keeping out luxuries, and comparative luxuries, has been to leave room in ships for the bringing of necessaries and comforts to the people. That is the real effect of the policy carried out. Millions of tons of imports which were actually being kept out of this country owing to the room which was occupied by the importation of luxuries, through the adoption of the policy announced by the Prime Minister, have been brought into this country, ships being used to better advantage for the bringing of those stocks which, I hope, are no unimportant factor in the winning of this War.

Mr. HOGGE: I wish to raise another subject, which is of great interest at the present moment, and which concerns perhaps the largest body of men, not in the country, but the largest body of men who are serving the country at the present moment. Recently certain increases of pay were announced to the Army and to the Navy, and it was announced that these increases of pay were to date from the 1st October. Presumably, therefore, those rates are now in operation, and are being paid to the two Services. In connection with that, there is an interesting point on which I hope somebody will say something, namely, as to where the sanction for that particular payment was obtained. It was announced, as the House will remember, in a letter from the Prime Minister to the First Lord of the Admiralty, and to the Secretary of State for War, while this House was in Recess. It

was stated in that letter, when this increase was announced, that it would obtain from the 1st October, on which date the House of Commons was not sitting. I suppose there is some authority for that, and that it can be defended. As a matter of interest, from the point of view of precedent in this House, I should be glad if someone would deal with the question of the sanction of that particular payment. It is calculated that at least £50,000,000 is involved in what was announced in that letter of the Prime Minister, and I do not know whether such a large expenditure of money can be made without the consent of the House. I see that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has just come in. I put the point to him in a question a few days ago. He then said that he had not looked into it at that moment, and that he would look into it. Therefore, I hope he will be able to say something to regularise what seems to me to be extraordinary action on the part of the Government, although I am quite satisfied with the result, namely, the awarding of £50,000,000 on the authority of a letter from the Prime Minister to the Secretary of State for War.

Putting that on one side, there are one or two points of criticism with regard to this pay which I think the House ought to examine. I suppose that the Government meant, honestly meant, to give an increase of pay to the soldier and to the sailor; but, if you examine the method in which the increase is given, I think the House will agree that in many cases there is no increase of pay at all, and that, as a matter of fact, many men who are serving both in the Army and the Navy are not one bit better off, because of the recent increase which has been announced. That is due to this fact, that, so far as I can determine, and I should be glad to be corrected on the point if I am wrong, the only allotment which the War Office and the Admiralty propose to carry is such allotment as itself carries the separation allowance. The House will understand what that means. In order to get the separation allowance the soldier and sailor have to make a compulsory allotment. The average case, of course, was the allotment of 3s. 6d., in order to obtain the separation allowance of 12s. That was a compulsory allotment, and I understand it is only in cases of that kind and, of course, in cases also of the dependants, who, where the compulsory 3s. 6d. was not paid,

might be getting less separation allowance. It is only that type of allotment which is being carried by the Government. Take the most notorious, unsettled case of injustice to the serving soldier and his dependants. We all remember that in the early days of the War a great number of young lads in their apprenticeship joined the Army and Navy voluntarily. They were then in receipt of very small wages, and they were unable to establish pre-war dependence, with the result that their dependants, in most cases their mothers, were unable to draw the separation allowance. It was, therefore, necessary that the lad, whether a soldier or a sailor, should make a voluntary allotment from his pay. Now the maximum voluntary allotment that a man in that position can make is, of course, three-fourths of his pay, or 9d. a day. I know many cases in which voluntary allotment is now being given by many of these soldiers and sailors to parents, and the lad has 1s. 3d. left of his pay. He is fighting at one or other of the fronts with the married soldier, whose 3s. 6d. is going to be carried by the Government, so that you will have, as the result of the scheme, the married soldier with 7s. of pay left in his pocket instead of 3s. 6d., his separation allotment being continued and carried by the Government; whereas the young lad whose dependants ought to be getting separation allowance, is still paying 5s. 3d. a week out of his pocket, and has only 1s. 3d. of his pay left.

I am quite sure that the Government do not intend this as the result of this scheme. It is due, of course, to the stupid resistance of the Treasury to deal with the question on the same basis all round. As the House knows, it is not dealt with on the same basis all round. In the case that I have alluded to it is a hardship on pre-war dependants, and, unless the dependants of these lads can actually prove poverty, they are unable to get pre-war allowance. I want the Government to make some advance in their scheme to cover the voluntary allotments made by soldiers and sailors in that position. I think it could be easily done. We all know that, after the 1st October, what voluntary allotment has been made by these men, and I would suggest, in order to equalise matters, and so that these men might get the benefit of the increased pay, that the Government should carry voluntary allotments to the 30th September of this year—that

is the day before the increase began. The test that requires to be made lies in the fact that the allotments have been made prior to that date. As to any amounts afterwards, there might be the criticism that they have been made in order to obtain the increase. If both the Admiralty and the Army authorities were to say that they would carry on all voluntary allotments—I do not ask for excess allotments—up to September 30th, then every serving soldier and every sailor will get the benefit of the increase which has been announced.

There are those who are making no allotment at all, and who are not receiving anything as the result of this increase. We want to be clear as to what the Government mean when they say they are increasing the soldiers' pay. They are really not, because the ordinary soldier who is paid his 1s. a day, if he makes no allotment, therefore does not get any allowance. In many cases single men are without dependants, but they are no better off as a result of the recent changes made in the pay. You therefore have a considerable amount of dissatisfaction between one soldier and another, who are doing practically the same work and facing the same dangers. It would not be a bad plan if you could regularise or equalise the different rates of pay in the Army. There is a good deal to be said perhaps on the point that of the men who are exposed to dangers, the Infantryman probably endures the greatest danger and hardship that there is at the front. I feel keenly for the man in the Infantry and in the front trench who gets his 1s. a day, while there are inside the Army men who are being paid 6s. per day, as they did upon transport work at the beginning of the War. A man in the Army can be transferred from any unit to any other unit, but if he is transferred his pay cannot be reduced from that which was given him in the particular service for which he enlisted. In certain Infantry regiments you may have a man who enlisted at special pay, anything from 3s. 4d. up to 6s., and he would be fighting alongside Infantrymen who have only the ordinary 1s. a day. That wants to be subjected to some kind of alteration. There are points of detail in regard to soldiers' pay which other Members probably will refer to, but I want to emphasise more particularly the point as to whether or not the Army Council can, with the consent of the Gov-

[Mr. Hogge.]

ernment, carry on voluntary allowances up to 30th September. That will satisfy me in so far as equalising the advantages of this new increase is concerned.

There is another point on which we ought, I think, to have an authoritative pronouncement. Hon. Members know that, in addition to the question of separation allowance, there are various bodies in existence which make grants to the serving soldier and the serving sailor. For instance, the Local War Pensions Committee may make a grant of a supplementary rent allowance to the soldier or the sailor, or the Civil Liabilities Committee may carry his rent, rates, taxes, insurance, school education fees, and things of that kind. We want to be told quite explicitly, and the men in the Army and the Navy ought to know, that this increase is in the nature of a war bonus, and that it will not affect any of the existing grants which he is drawing at present. Those have been effected in the past. Supposing a private in the Army was getting £10 from the Civil Liabilities Committee to cover rent, and was promoted to the rank of sergeant, involving an increase of pay, the Civil Liabilities Committee immediately reviewed the grant, and it was either withdrawn or reduced. If these two Committees pursue that policy with regard to this proposed increase of 3s. 6d., that represents £9 2s., which is about the average rent paid by the average soldier in a great many parts of the country. Does the Government propose by the operation of those Committees to take away with the right hand what it gives with the left, and thereby practically do away with the increase of pay? There has been no suggestion or no decision yet given with regard to the position in which many officers in the British Army find themselves. Many of them and their wives and dependents are finding it very difficult, in view of the prolongation of the War, to meet their obligations. Everyone in the House knows the type of men to whom I refer, occupying a good social position, keeping up a respectable house, and sending the children to a good school. Out of the pay they receive it is absolutely impossible to maintain the position they were in before they joined the Army. They might have done so for a year or a couple of years, but now that the War has been so prolonged, I am sure hon. Members know a great many cases where

officers are eating up their accumulated capital in order to maintain their obligations at home while they are serving abroad.

I think the Government ought to come to a much more common-sense decision with regard to dealing with the wives and dependants of officers who require support in order to maintain them in the position to which they have been accustomed. At present officers under a certain rank can go to the Civil Liabilities Committee, and if that Committee will carry certain obligations then the Government say that is providing a separation allowance for the wife and dependant. I have tried the Civil Liabilities Committee; in fact, I am a member, and, therefore, I have seen a great deal of this thing in detail. I know how extraordinarily difficult it is for a serving officer to establish a claim for help in the way of a grant from the Civil Liabilities Committee. I suggest that the War Office should announce at once what they are going to do in the way of provision of separation allowance for the wives and dependants of officers. The rule that ought to obtain is the rule we all want—that we do not want either officer or man to suffer for the sacrifice and work he is giving to the country. That is the general rule we have tried to observe. I think the mistake the Government have made is in trying to meet these difficulties as they arise by establishing fresh Committees, one taking up one part of the obligation and another another part of the obligation, so that the serving soldier or officer has to make application to different sources in order to collect all that it is possible to obtain. The man ought to know what he is entitled to and how much he is going to get, and there ought to be one place where he can get it. It ought not to be necessary to find out what he can get from the Civil Liability Committee or other Committees, or what he can get from the Lansdowne House Fund. There is one other point in the Army in which I think the Admiralty have now got ahead of the Army. In these proposed changes there is no man serving in the Navy who does not get the benefit of pay and pension when he has reached the service term of years. There are soldiers who have attained the number of years that entitled them to a pension, and they do not draw pay and pension; they are practically the only men in the British service in that position. Every sailor gets it, and in these new Regulations I hope my right hon.

Friend the Financial Secretary will meet me on this point. The Financial Secretary corrects my statement, and he assures me that this rule from the 1st of October is also followed in the Army. I had not observed it, but I am perfectly satisfied that the whole thing is equalised.

With regard to the Navy, I would like my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to tell us something of how this new free kit which is promised in this statement is to be distributed to the Navy. The changes on the side of the Admiralty are bigger and more far-reaching than on the side of the Army. For the first time in my knowledge, and I suppose in the history of the Navy, the men after being served with a free kit are to have it maintained, just as the men of the Army have it maintained. What position will the men who are in the Navy maintaining their own kit be under this Regulation? I have confined my remarks to the question of increase of pay, although there is a strong temptation to raise other points. My final point is to ask are these proposals only temporary proposals? People are running away with the idea that it is an increase of pay, but really it is not, because the Government is only carrying for the soldier a temporary payment which he is making, and when that temporary payment stops then of course the expenditure of money will stop. For instance, in ordinary times a man does not get a separation allowance, and if the authorities carry the 3s. 6d. now and that stops, then of course away goes that sum. And the same in the Navy. It is the same with the question of the 1d., 2d., and 3d. for the three years' service; when the War stops that stops. It is the same with the efficiency pay after six months, for when the War stops that stops. I would like either or both of my right hon. Friends to tell us the nature of these proposals. I said at the beginning I was very grateful for them. I have not chivied the right hon. Gentleman like those outside, who have asked them to put up the soldier's pay to a perfectly extravagant point, which could not be worked in any conceivable way during this War, and which would create a confusion.

The points as to which I have asked information are the kind of things the men want to know. I came down from Scotland last week with a carriage full of sailors, and they said to me, "When you go back to the House of Commons ask somebody who has got to know about the

Navy if this increase is going to stop after the War because we have got to stop in the Navy after the War is over, and are we going to carry on any of the increase of pay that is supposed to be given to us now into the Service after the War is over." As everybody knows who has paid any attention to the subject, we can never have our old Army and Navy again after peace is declared on the same basis, and the conditions will have to be very different if you want to attract men to the Army and Navy, and both those Services will be very different institutions, offering very superior advantages than were ever offered before, if you are to persuade men to follow careers in either the Army or the Navy. Therefore, when we have an opportunity of this kind, and an increase of Grants amounting to £50,000,000, I think it is worth while for a few hours to raise these points, and see whether we can get a decision. I intended to have spoken on the question of chevrons, but I understand an hon. Friend is raising that point, in which I very heartily support him. He intends to mention the case of the Territorials who were sent to India at the outbreak of war to take the place of our Regular Army, which came back to France, and to claim that those men should be entitled to the same kind of distinction as the other men in the fighting parts of the various fronts. I hope my hon. Friend will pursue that in greater detail than I have. I hope we may be able to have a satisfactory reply for the points I have raised.

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY to the WAR OFFICE (Mr. Forster): My hon. Friend who has just spoken began his observations by asking for the solution of a problem which I may say at once I am not able to answer. He wanted to know what sanction there was for the giving of the increase of pay to the soldier and the sailor which has been announced as dating from the 1st of October. I am afraid that is a constitutional question which I must leave to be solved by the Leader of the House. I imagine, however, as the money is paid out of the Vote of Credit, and as the Votes were taken in token form, that the sanction of the House may have been anticipated in that manner, and in the same way as the separation allowance; but I will not pretend to pass final judgment on that question, and I will leave my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the

[Mr. Forster.]

Exchequer to deal with it when a suitable opportunity arises. My hon. Friend has which we have made or in regard to the announcements which have been made, and he has made one or two suggestions. He will forgive me if I do not go into detail, either in support of the proposals which we have made, or in regard to the suggestions which have fallen from himself. If it had not been for the fact that the Government have taken into reconsideration the question of the pay of the soldier, I should have been glad to deal with the matter now. As the House no doubt is aware, the Prime Minister referred to the question of the proposals that have been made, and which have been referred back to the Cabinet Committee which first considered them. Until the Cabinet have had an opportunity of considering the matter further, I do not think we shall gain very much by a close analysis or consideration of the recommendations.

Mr. HOGGE: That does not hold anything up?

Mr. FORSTER: It holds nothing up. My hon. Friend has asked me whether or not any of the increases which have been given, or will be given, under this scheme which has been put forward are to be withdrawn or dismissed by the action, either of the Civil Liabilities Committee or the War Pensions Committee. In our opinion that is not only undesirable, but it would frustrate the intention which lies at the root of the increases which have been proposed. My hon. Friend asked whether we were regarding this in the nature of a war bonus. That is so. With that assurance I hope my hon. Friend will be content. He next referred to the question of the remuneration of officers and the sustenance and support necessary for their families. He knows quite well that the position of officers, especially junior officers, is at the present time under the consideration of the Cabinet. I confess that I had hoped we should have been in a position before now to make an announcement upon what is proposed in regard to the officers. I am sure my hon. Friend will realise that the question of officers is even more difficult than that of the private soldier. It has certainly been from no lack of desire to reach a speedy conclusion that we have not yet done so. I hope—greatly hope!—we shall be in a position to make some announcement in regard to

this next week. I should prefer to defer the consideration of these proposals until the matter was finally settled as to whether or not any further increases, or any further change, is going to be made. I cannot say at the moment whether it will be possible to make any change or to make any increase. That is certainly not for me to say.

Mr. HOGGE: Shall we have an opportunity of discussing the matter? The trouble always is that these things are made and done, and then we do not have an opportunity of discussing them. If my right hon. Friend can promise us an opportunity of discussing the changes before they actually crystallise we shall be very glad.

Mr. FORSTER: I think my hon. Friend knows very well that I cannot make any promise of that kind. That matter, obviously, is one for the Leader of the House. The House will, of course, have an opportunity of criticising sooner or later the proposals which are made, even if hon. Members do not have that opportunity before the proposals are carried into effect. I should have been very glad to say a word in reference to the question of soldiers' pay generally, because I have been responsible for the administration of pay and separation allowance for some considerable time. It is not from any lack of good-will, it is not from any lack of appreciation of the debt that we owe to the soldier that we have not been able before now to make proposals in regard to an increase in his pay. Our debt to those who fight, and suffer, and bleed, and die for us cannot be measured in terms of money. Neither does their endurance and valour vary according to the amount which they receive. Be it much or be it little, they fight as well. Heroism cannot be bought and sold. Therefore, I am sure the House will agree that we should fix the pay of these gallant men, not in accordance with what they deserve, but in accordance with what the country can afford to pay, taking into account all the circumstances of the time. That is the spirit in which the Government have approached this question. I hope, before long, we shall be in a position to make some definite and final announcement in regard to it.

Mr. THOMAS-STANFORD: I desire to say a few words in reference to another matter connected with the management

and discipline of the Army. I refer to the leave of the men serving both at home and abroad. From the correspondence which reaches me—and I believe there are other Members in the House who find themselves in the same position—there is a very widespread feeling of a very prevalent sense of injustice in regard to the apportionment of leave. We know that the Army Council has made Regulations on this subject. They are liberal Regulations, I believe, especially with reference to paying the cost of travel, and so on. The complaints which pour in from various sources are to the effect that these Regulations are not carried out, that there are a large number of men who do not obtain the leave to which they are entitled. We are told that in the last resort this matter must rest with the commanding officer. I suggest that any infringement of a man's right to leave by his commanding officer should be only a temporary and exceptional matter. According to the complaints that reach me that is not the case. I am aware that in regard to the distant scenes of warfare, Salonika and Mesopotamia, for instance, the question of leave is an almost impossible one. But I suppose if the War goes on for any further prolonged period that will have to be very seriously considered. This consideration, however, does not apply to Great Britain and France. We are not now in those bitter days of emergency which the Prime Minister so eloquently described to the House on Monday, when every available man, even the cooks and the drivers, had to be sent into the trenches to maintain the front line. The Army to-day is a highly organised machine. Such matters as these of leave ought, in my opinion, to work like clockwork. The soldier ought to have the leave to which he is entitled as much as the pay to which he is entitled. This matter, too, is not one that simply concerns the soldier himself. The present Army is composed of men who have left, or have been taken from, their farms, from merchandise, and in many cases have left temporary helpers to "carry on" during their absence. The question of leave, of even a few days, by which they can return to their businesses and by their activities in this country give a helping word or a suggestion as to how matters may be carried on, is one of very serious and practical importance. I desire to urge this question of leave on the War

Office. I hope that the authorities will see that every soldier who is entitled to leave shall obtain it.

Major E. WOOD: There is one subject to which I do wish to direct the attention of the Under-Secretary of State for War. It affects very personally the officers and men serving in France. As everybody knows, at the present time it is impossible to adhere strictly to the principle that the men or the officers, after being sick or wounded, should be reposted to their own unit. It is often necessary that formations which have experienced heavy casualties should be made up quickly. For that reason it is often inevitable that officers and men have to be diverted from their own unit and sent to fill up the ranks of the casualties. But I wish to point out to the House—quite shortly stated—and I will give reasons for what I say—is that there is a widespread suspicion in France among officers and men that this system of transferring is made much wider use of than is really necessary in the circumstances of the case. I understand that the original scheme on which these matters was arranged was that, so far as possible, the administration in France and in England worked on a division of the men into three classes. There was, first, the class of men who were wounded, or went sick, in France and who were cured in that country and returned to duty without coming home. The second class of men were they who, after being wounded or sick, were returned to England and cured. The third class of men were they who went straight out from England after having joined up. I am told, and I should like to know whether it is so, that the idea as to the first class was that they were to be returned to their actual unit: that in regard to the second class that they should be returned, not necessarily to the same battalion, but to the same regiment. In respect to the third class, the pool in England, I do not think there is much to quarrel about. But if that was the system, and I was told it was on pretty good authority yesterday, it has been and is being very gravely departed from at the present moment.

I have in my pocket the instances of one officer and many men of my own regiment who went sick and were cured in France and then, in spite of the fact that they belonged to a mounted regiment which was still kept mounted and maintained as a unit in France were, on their recovery,

[Major E. Wood.]

sent to the base and transformed into Infantry. I should like to direct the attention of the hon. Gentleman especially to the case of the officer. He has served in my regiment continuously since 1911. He was in command of a squadron and had never been struck off the strength of the regiment. Yet the next thing we hear about him is that he is learning Infantry drill at an Infantry base in France. That there was some mistake I think is proved, because when through the usual channels extreme protests were lodged in due course the officer was returned to my regiment, where he now is. But the same thing is going on with a great many men. We have, for instance, had men wounded in July and in September they were at an Infantry base, although we want these men back because we are short of men. Instead, however, of getting our own non-commissioned officers and men, we get men from other parts of England without any territorial or county association with us, while our own men are sent to Infantry units with which they also have no such association. So much for the particular instances I have in my pocket and which I am prepared to show the hon. Gentleman if he so desires.

But with regard to the general question, I agree most fully—I discount nothing—with everything he will tell me as to the inevitableness of the system, because I know it is true and indeed everybody must know it. But I would ask him this, and here I cannot give particular cases because I have never been at the base myself and the officers from whom I have had information obviously have not been in an official position to know the exact truth of the situation at the present moment. There is a general suspicion that this is what is happening. The base is warned one day to send a draft on the following day to, say, the East Yorkshire Regiment, and, consequently, a draft is warned which is comprised, say, for the sake of argument, in great bulk of East Yorkshire men who may happen to be at the base at the moment. But rather later in the day—I am putting an extreme case—a demand comes over the telephone for a draft for another battalion of, say, the Suffolks. The instructions are that it must be made up at once, in view of forthcoming operations. I have been told—I have no means of checking the information—that the administration at the base often, rather than take the trouble of

making up a draft composed largely of Suffolk men, send the draft which has already been warned for the East Yorkshire Regiment to the Suffolk battalion, and later on the East Yorkshire Regiment gets a draft which is largely composed of Suffolk men. That is an extreme statement, I admit, but I put it in that form in order to make my point clear. It is impossible for me, or for anybody unconnected with the administration at the base, to check the accuracy of these statements, but I believe it will not be possible to find a single regiment or battalion in France that does not think that that is the sort of thing happening.

There is no need for me to emphasise the importance of this matter, or the effect of such procedure on the psychology of individual men, but one certainly cannot over-estimate the importance of this idea spreading amongst officers and men in France of whom the Prime Minister said a few days ago that they have done almost superhuman things. There is a certain danger that you should rather tend to forget that these men are themselves human, and these things, little as they may seem to the machine working, and unimportant as they may appear to be, yet carry with them a sentiment that goes down to the very bottom and makes these officers and men what they are. They do not complain because they are fighting up to their waists in mud. They will do these things almost up to breaking point, but it becomes all the harder for them when they are called upon to do it in company with officers and men with whom they have no territorial association. I am sure that at this moment, and in fact right through the War, these associations have been the force that makes for patriotism, and it is a force which ought not to be ignored.

This matter is also important for this other reason. I know, as everybody must know, who has to do with these affairs, that these transfers are most bitterly resented, not only by the men themselves, but by their relations. Let us not forget that the Army now is no longer a small thing. It is the nation. I have had letters from men's mothers and fathers, and others, complaining bitterly about this, and saying that the men seem to be treated as machines rather than as men. Of course, that is not true. But it is very dangerous that such an idea should get into their minds. I think it will do a

great deal of good if the hon. Gentleman who is responsible for the War Office in this House would state quite simply and straightforwardly what the policy of the War Office and of the Army is in this matter. If he will state, as I hope he will, that cases of such transfers are, of course, in certain circumstances unavoidable, but that they are not made unless the actual necessities of the situation demand it—if he will state that, and if he will also take such steps as may be necessary to see that this system is worked in accordance with that policy when he has laid it down—and that will demand careful examination by reliable people of the actual working of the officials at the base—if the hon. Gentleman will do that, and nobody could do it better than he—nobody more than he is calculated to give confidence to the people concerned—if he will do that I think it will be the means of removing a great deal of misconception and preventing a great deal of mischief which is on foot in various ways at the moment and is due to what is really a lack of appreciation of the subject by the men and their relations, and also perhaps to a little carelessness in administration by the people in charge of the business in France.

Mr. NEEDHAM: I agree with what has fallen from the hon. Gentleman opposite, because what he has said tallies exactly with my own experience, for I have had many letters and complaints from relatives on this subject of transfers to units with which the soldiers have no sort of association. I believe it does affect the psychology of the Army at the present time, but I do not wish to dwell upon that point. I rose to deal with another question, that of the chevrons issued to soldiers during the War. I want to know if it is intended that they shall be given to the Territorials who went out to Egypt in 1914. I am not quite clear as to the definition of the words "theatres of War," as used in the terms of the Order regulating the issue of chevrons. Some people interpret the phrase as applying strictly only to those theatres where actual fighting occurs. It may be that in Egypt in 1914 there was no actual fighting. That I cannot say off-hand, but there certainly was in 1915 on the Canal.

This is a matter which very much concerns the Manchester district, from which the East Lancashire Territorial Division went to Egypt in September, 1914. It was the first complete division of Territorials

to leave this country. I am not sure whether they were the first Territorials to leave England, but they were certainly the first complete division. They went out complete with their Army Service Corps, Artillery, R.A.M.C., and every other Department. Afterwards, as this House knows, they were one of the famous divisions which went to Gallipoli in 1915 and so distinguished themselves there. Now the point I am raising is one which concerns many families and homes in East Lancashire, and considering the fact that these men, many of whom had served for years as Territorials, at a moment's notice surrendered their pledge to defend their country at home and accept the responsibility of defending it abroad, it does seem to me that the words "theatres of war" should be construed in a manner will include the Territorials and others who went to Egypt in the year 1914. I should like to hear what the representative of the War Office has to say on that point. I am quite satisfied this House would welcome any announcement to the effect that the phrase "theatres of war" did in fact include the Territorials and others to whom I have referred. I have had letters from men serving who came from other parts of the Empire, and also went to Egypt, but I am going to limit—selfishly it may be—my point to the case of the East Lancashire Territorial Division—the 42nd—and I hope the hon. Gentleman will give me a reassuring reply on the point I have raised.

Colonel Lord HENRY CAVENDISH-BENTINCK: There are two or three grievances I would like to bring to the notice of the representative of the War Office, if he will kindly give me his attention for a few moments, and in doing so I would specially disclaim any political spirit, because there is no greater admirer than I am of the courteous attention which the hon. Gentleman always shows to Members. The first thing I would like to bring to his notice is the manner in which separation allowances are paid. I asked him last week a question on this subject, and was told that the separation allowances are paid at the date of application. I cannot help thinking that my hon. Friend in answering that question was misinformed because, although I know that separation allowances are paid automatically to soldiers' wives, that is not so in the case of dependants, as the dependency has to be assessed.

[Lord H. Cavendish-Bentinck.]

Separation allowances, so I am informed, are not paid until the dependency is assessed. That may not be for some considerable time. In other words, the soldier may have had an allotment deducted for several months before it is added to by the separation allowance. That grievance is sometimes accentuated, and I believe often accentuated, by the fact that the application forms are lost. I asked a question about the case of Sergeant Hatfield. He applied for separation allowance for a dependant on April 12th. His form was lost. Application was made by him, and for him, no less than six times, and on each occasion the application form was lost. So far as I know the application form is still lost, because although Sergeant Hatfield applied on April 12th his dependant has not yet received the separation allowance. The remedy is a very simple one. Instead of one application form being issued to a soldier he might have three, one to give to his regimental quartermaster-sergeant, one to keep himself, and another he could send home. That would automatically register his application, and in the future no question would arise from the loss of application forms. I hope my hon. Friend will give the matter his kind consideration.

There is also the question of leave mentioned by an hon. Member opposite. The Government have given pledges about increased leave for the Western Forces, but I understand that these pledges do not hold good so far as the Eastern Forces are concerned. The regiment with which I had the honour to serve is out there, and has been out there since April 1915, and as a good many men have not had any leave I take a personal interest in this question. I know it is difficult to get these men home from Salonika, Gaza, and so on; but now that land transport is arranged for through Italy I should have thought it would have been possible to arrange for leave in a more general manner than has been done in the past.

I have had brought to my notice the grievances of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. I notice on the posters on the walls that recruits are urgently wanted for this corps, and I believe recruiting is by no means satisfactory, and that the Force is by no means up to strength. Of course there is a reason for

it, and the reason for it is that the conditions of service are by no means satisfactory. I asked a question a day or two ago as to whether these girls were entitled to pensions if they lost their health. I was told that they have the Insurance Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act to fall back upon if they lose their health. As the whole idea in recruiting these women is to consider them as part of the Army, I think they have a very strong claim to pensions supposing that their health is ruined for life. The manner in which they are being treated in France is not, to my mind, at all satisfactory, and it accounts for the discontent and unpopularity from which this corps suffers. For instance, these girls only get one pair of shoes issued to them. If those get wet and have to be mended these girls have to supply the deficiency themselves. No underclothing is issued to them, and no rainproof cloak or mackintosh. It may easily be understood that when these girls get wet, as they have only one set of uniform issued to them, they have to sit and let the clothes dry on their bodies. I am told that at the hostel at Havre there is a sick room, but that there are no attendants, no appliances, and no sick diet. These may occur to my hon. Friend as small points, but they make up a sum total which I think is militating against the success of this corps.

There is another point which I should like to bring to my hon. Friend's notice, and that is, the Government allowance per person in the auxiliary hospitals. At the beginning of the War the Government allowance was fixed at 3s. per head. That was all right at the beginning of the War, but now I submit it is entirely inadequate. I am informed that by the most rigid economy patients can be fed for 2s. 2d. per head, but that when you take into consideration equipment, light, coal, washing, surgery, wages, and rent of hospital, you cannot possibly do it for less than 3s. 8d. per head—that is to say 8d. per person has to be found by voluntary money. When there are, say, eighty or a hundred patients in the hospital that comes to a considerable sum of money. Personally, I do not think that is right. The Financial Secretary just now said you cannot possibly assess the heroism of our soldiers in terms of money. I heartily agree with that sentiment, and all I ask is that the Government should be as good as their word. It is not right that any

charge for these men in hospital should be a matter of charity. The least the Government can do, as a matter of gratitude, not only to our gallant soldiers but to the devoted way in which the V.A.D.'s and ladies in these auxiliary hospitals have been running this aid all throughout the War is to give adequate allowances to them.

Colonel PENRY WILLIAMS: I wish to take advantage of this Vote of Credit, when the Government are asking for a grant of money, to press on my hon. Friend representing the War Office (Mr. Macpherson) the necessity of attending to the hardships and grievances under which a good many of my poorer Constituents are suffering. Some two months ago a correspondent wrote to the local papers at home and pointed out that many parents and wives of soldiers are suffering very acutely from the inability of their sons to obtain leave to visit their homes. He made a practical suggestion, namely, that anybody with such a grievance should at once write to me, as his Member, stating fully the particulars of the case and asking me to lay it before the authorities at the War Office. He made one other suggestion, which I am glad myself has been carried out, and that was that local committees should be formed, not only in my own Constituency but throughout the North of England, to urge upon the War Office the claims of these men for leave. The result of this letter was that I received a very great number of letters from women who wanted their husbands back, from mothers and fathers who wanted to see their sons, and from various people about their relatives who were out at the front. I considered what I should do with these letters. I had had some experience of the War Office, and of sending communications to the Secretary of the War Office, and I dreaded the usual buff form. I felt that a buff form was not sufficient, was not a fitting answer or an adequate consolation to people into whose lives such a tragedy had come. There were women whose husbands had been away for nearly three years.

I am not going to weary the House by reading these letters, but I have a case here of a mother asking for her son to come home. He has been out since 1915; she has lost her husband and her two sons, one in the Dardanelles and one in France, and she wants to see this one boy, who is in Salonika. In one expression in her letter she says:

"I would give part of my life if that boy could come home only for a short time."

The other letter I have in my hand here is from a wife who is asking for her husband to come home. He has been out in Salonika for over two and a half years. She says she has one little boy who is nearly three years old who has never seen his father, and a little girl of five years old who cannot remember him. I think every Member of this House will agree with me that such letters are pathetic in the extreme. I sent the letters to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, and he sent me a very prompt and courteous letter in reply, as he always does. Unfortunately his reply, although sympathetic, did not carry us very much further towards the solution of this problem. I think my hon. Friend will agree with me—perhaps he knows better than I do—that there is a very large quantity of very inflammable material lying around this question, and that if any Member of this House, or public man outside, were so forgetful of his duty to his country as to seek to make political profit or personal popularity for himself by going out into his own constituency and stirring up trouble on this question he could get up a first-class outcry, and from people who have a just cause of complaint. I recognise the difficulties of my hon. Friend and those responsible for the conduct of this great War. Their difficulties are enormous, and one with limited knowledge can see that, but if something can be done I do hope they will make an effort to do it. It is very hard on many of these people, and while I fully recognise that very great strides have been made on the leave question in remedying the grievances of soldiers who are serving in France and in Belgium quite recently—and I gratefully acknowledge that, because I have had numbers of letters cancelling previous application, and saying that their son has now had leave—unfortunately the more distant theatres of war have remained practically untouched, and the poor people who have relatives in Salonika, Malta, Egypt, Mesopotamia and India are almost in despair, and have very nearly abandoned all hope of ever seeing their relatives and friends again.

I know very well the great sympathy that my hon. Friend opposite has with me in this matter. I have had private conversations with him, and I know the sympathy which he has in the matter. But I would ask him if he could give us some assurance

[Colonel P. Williams.]

that if a certain amount of leave is available to these men it would be fairly and equitably shared out irrespective of rank, but in accordance with the length of service which the men have had away from home? Then, again, will he see that a man who is transferred from one unit to another, owing to the exigencies of the Service, does not lose his pension on the leave list—that is, that he carries his seniority for leave from his old unit to his new unit, and does not automatically go back to the bottom of the list on the new unit? Then, will he see that if privilege leave is granted to anyone, the granting of it does not deprive a man of his fair terms? I would add one more request. If no leave is possible, will he make a definite announcement on that subject? Will he say definitely that no man can have leave from those theatres of war? Then he will get rid of a suspicion, which is unfounded I know, but which is prevalent, that the lower a man's rank is the less chance he has of getting leave. In conclusion, I would point out to my hon. Friend that those people who are applying to me are ardently loyal. Their men went to the War long before there was any talk of Conscriptio or compulsion, and if any body of men is entitled to consideration, it is that body which is composed of those men who answered Lord Kitchener's call in the first instance, and at once took up arms in defence of their King and their country.

Sir JOHN AINSWORTH: I should like to call attention to two matters of rather considerable importance. As we all know, the Government has had, in the interests of the country, and with the object of carrying on the War, to take over a great number of businesses. The businesses that has been taken over are enormous and of all kinds, but there is only one which, certainly in my opinion, and I think in the opinion of the country, has been a decided success, and that is the railways. As we all know, the railways have been extraordinarily well managed. The staffs have been depleted or largely reduced, the amount of work that the railways have had to do has increased enormously, and yet you may say that everything in the way of carrying out such an enormous business as the railways of the country has been extremely well done, immensely to the interests of the country, and, I think, to the satisfaction almost of everybody.

How has that been done? Because the business is controlled and managed entirely by the railway managers.

Mr. FIELD: By business men.

Sir J. AINSWORTH: The hon. Member is quite right. I do not know what would have happened if a body of officials, employed for the immediate purposes of the War, had been installed instead of utilising the services of the best railway managers in the country. A great many businesses besides the railways have been taken over—mines, manufactories, and all sorts of things—and I am sorry to say that we cannot see anything like the admirable management of the railways in the course the Government pursued when they took over mines and other things. I will not go further now than to say that I am afraid that the loss of money has been enormous. Now we all know, whether we happen to be connected with business or not, that the great essential in business is management. When the man who happens to be the proprietor of the business is divorced from his work when the business is taken over by the Government you lose the mainspring of the whole concern; you lose the aptitude and the desire to practice economy on every point, and the long and short of it is just the difference between a well-managed business and a badly managed business, and we know there is only one end to a badly-managed business. I do think it would be most advantageous if the Government would take thoroughly into their consideration that when they take over a concern they should at the same time have the same managers, the same owners, the same directors who have had the management of the business. Let us insist as taxpayers on the taking over at the same time of the managing centre, the managing machinery that conducts the business.

I would call attention also to another point which, I think, the Government has neglected altogether, or almost altogether. We all know what is the meaning of exempted trades. The Government, of course, soon came to the conclusion that men were not only wanted but were absolutely required for other things besides the work of the soldier, and that it would be very bad economy to send certain men out to the front because they are far better employed at home. Therefore, a large number of exempted trades have grown up, because their work is

wanted, or it is assumed that it is wanted, here at home. I do not want to go at length into the question of how far exempted trades may have been adopted as an excuse for men not going out to serve their country at the front. The point I want to draw attention to is one which would get rid of a difficulty of that kind. The case I allude to is a man being allowed to get continuous work at home through exemption instead of having to go to the front. I think the reason that is done should be made quite clear and thoroughly understood. I recognise the importance of the man-power of the country, and we want every man who is liable and fit and who is not exempted to go to the front. Nevertheless, I think it should be made plain not only by the War Office but by everybody concerned, that exemption from foreign service only arises when a man devotes himself to continuous work at home in the interests of the State. Let us hear no more of exempted men remaining at home who do not attend to their work steadily and readily, and who are not prepared when a dispute arises to have the matter arbitrated upon at once. I think both employers, and certainly the taxpayers, should insist upon it that the moment a man resorts to a strike instead of arbitration his exemption should fall to the ground. The only object of exemption is to permit a man to continue to do his work at home in the national interests instead of going to the front. I was glad to hear the Leader of the House and the former Chancellor of the Exchequer were unanimous as to the way they spoke of the immense importance of practising economy. Why should we allow any of our men to be indulging in quarrels and disputes? It is not good enough.

Mr. FIELD: How are you going to stop it?

Sir J. AINSWORTH: People who do not know much about work and the labour question are inclined to think that it is difficult to agree upon these matters. There are good men, indifferent men, bad men, useful and useless men in every rank of life and in every part of the United Kingdom. We must bear in mind that we are all open to quarrels, disputes, and misunderstandings, and disputes should not occur if they can be avoided, and the sooner you go to arbitration the better. If a man is exempted from serving with the Colours his duty is to attend to his work at home. If these two points in

regard to proper management of the business of the Government and a proper understanding in regard to exempted men are dealt with, I am sure the taxpayer will save immensely. Many people are now employed who are totally ignorant of business methods, and we are simply throwing away the money of the taxpayers.

Major LANE-FOX: My only excuse for inflicting a speech upon the House is that I have one or two points with regard to what I consider is the want of consideration which seems to be shown in the treatment of our men in the Army in France—treatment which I think is very undesirable, and which I feel sure if drawn attention to will be brought to an end. The common practice of transferring men without their consent from the unit to which they belong to another in which they may be total strangers has already been referred to, and that is something which the men bitterly resent. You find a man doing extremely well in his battalion and the officers respect him; he has enlisted very early, and has everything to his credit. Through no fault of his own he is wounded and becomes sick and he is sent to the base, where he is put among a lot of conscripts who have had very little training, and who are certainly not of the same standing as himself. This man resents that bitterly, because he is treated at the base depots on the same footing as those with whom he has been placed. He is put through the most elementary form of drill, very often in a bullying manner, and that man, after a few weeks, is very often in such a state of disgust that he is ready to throw up the service and give up all interest in it. Now, all this is not necessary, and more consideration should be shown to such men. After this man gets well, instead of being sent to his own battalion where he was before he may be sent to a strange battalion, or to some other regiment, just because the staff officer who has the arrangements to make will not take the trouble to sort out their drafts. I know there may be many cases in which it is not possible to prevent that happening, but that does not occur so frequently as the practice to which I have alluded. This could all be avoided if a little more trouble was taken, and I hope the hon. Gentleman representing the Government will call the attention of the proper authorities to this matter, for I am certain it can be altered. I have had this complaint made to me by a good many

[Major Lane-Fox.]

commanding officers of battalions. the higher authorities do not want this thing to go on; but it is somewhere in the middle that it happens. If it could be stopped a very real grievance would be remedied.

I should just like to allude to the recent dismounting of units sent to France. It was inevitable; because it is obvious that there is not much opportunity for mounted men in France at the present time; but it was perfectly unnecessary for the authorities to do it as they did. If the thing had been prefaced by some little memo going round, stating that the men had done good service, and generally patting them on the back, but that it was necessary to change their character, and probably asking if the commanding officers could make some suggestions to make the change more palatable to them, it would not have been so unpleasant. There, again, the Higher Command was very sympathetic, and had no wish to injure the feelings of the men; but the way in which it was carried out by the Staff was most unfortunate. An order came down that the horses were to go and that the men were to be transferred to the infantry. They were given no explanation why it was done, and they were treated just as if they had disgraced themselves—as if they had lost their character in some way or other—and as if this was the punishment for it. We all know what deep affection a man forms for a horse, especially if it is his own horse, which he originally brought out with him; but that affection was ignored, and, finally, when the men marched into this depot they had their tails down, as if they were in disgrace. They were men of the very best class, as was recognised by all of the Higher Command; but the fault of some staff officer—probably one of those individuals with a decoration of a high class, sitting at a desk—was a serious one, and a very great disappointment was caused. Later the fault was remedied, and the battalions to which these men went were given the names of the battalions from which they came. After the men had gone through their course of training at the base depot, the commanding letter arrived, saying how excellent they were and how much the Army were indebted to them. If that had come at the start, a lot of this trouble would have been saved. At first, when they arrived at the various depots to train, they were subjected to a rather unpleasant attitude on the part of the instructors,

which caused very considerable dissatisfaction among them, though afterwards, when the authorities realised what they were, the treatment was changed.

All this sort of thing takes away from the value of individuals. If you only get those men bound together in one unit, proud of each other and helping each other, their fighting value is infinitely greater than anything you can produce by such methods as I have described. I am perfectly certain that the Higher Command does not know this sort of thing is going on, but there is a certain slackness in certain quarters, and attention should be drawn to it. One hon. Gentleman has already pleaded for an extension of leave facilities, and I should like to emphasise what he has said, though I know perhaps better than he does the great difficulties there are both as regards railway stock and ships. With regard to the subject of waste, I can testify from what I know to the very great improvement that has taken place as regards the Army in France. When I first went out there things were being wasted broadcast which are now carefully guarded, and it ought to be said for the credit of the authorities in France, especially having regard to the way things are wasted here at home, that all through the Army in France this particular point of waste is most closely looked into and guarded against.

Sir J. SPEAR: I desire to make another appeal to the Under-Secretary of State for War to arrange for the Territorials serving in India to have the chevron that it is proposed to confer on other soldiers. I recognise the courtesy of the hon. Member's answer to my question this afternoon, but I am bound to say that it was not wholly satisfactory. There are one or two points which I would ask him to consider before he definitely decides his action in this matter. These men enlisted only for home service, but when the War broke out they volunteered for foreign service. They were prepared to go to France or any other front, but the Government decided to send them to India. The House, I think, will recognise the great importance and the great value of these trained men being ready to take the place of the Regulars who had to be removed from India to the various fronts, especially in France. We have been reminded that India was denuded of soldiers to a menacing extent. Consequently, these men who had been trained were rendering

the country very great service in taking the place of the Regulars removed by the stress of war. They went to India, I would remind the hon. Gentleman, in accordance with the wish and orders of the Government. It was thought that they could render more effective service there than in France. They were willing to go to France, and I submit that they ought not to be treated differently than they would have been treated if they had gone to France. It is true that many of these men have not actually had to fight, though some of them have gone to Mesopotamia and some have fought in the frontier rising, but they have had to face a climate not at all suitable to the health of an Englishman, and they have been separated for some three years from their friends at home.

These men had devoted years to qualifying themselves for the defence of their country. They were farm lads and farmers' sons. I know many of them who joined at Tavistock years before the War broke out. They recognised the necessity which, unhappily, a good many men did not, of being prepared to defend their country's interests. They were willing to go anywhere to fight their country's battles, although they had only undertaken the duty of Home Defence. I appeal to the hon. Gentleman not to differentiate against these men in a way that will make them disappointed and even dissatisfied, and leave a rankling feeling of injustice. The chevron does not cost much money, but it is a recognition of their patriotism in doing foreign service in the crisis in the history of their country which these men will value as long as they live. I can testify that there is a good deal of dissatisfaction among the men caused by the statement that they are to be kept out of this recognition of self-sacrifice and service. I hope that the Under-Secretary will see that such a grievance is not permitted. We all appreciate the work of the Territorials. In his speech the other day, the Prime Minister eloquently described the services of all sections of the soldiers of the King, and pointed out the way in which the Territorials had fought and the very creditable manner in which they had done their part. It would be an injustice if this simple national token of appreciation was withheld from these men simply because the Government decided that they should go to India rather than to France. I know the hon. Gentleman's

sympathy with all ranks of the Service, and I am sure that if he will concede this point he will avoid a considerable feeling of irritation and disappointment on the part of men who have shown their patriotism by offering to go anywhere, although there was no legal obligation upon them to do so.

The UNDER-SECRETARY of STATE for WAR (Mr. Macpherson): The discussion to-night has ranged over a large number of topics. Most of the speeches that have been delivered upon Army questions have dealt in some form, either directly or indirectly, with the question of leave; accordingly, it would be fitting that I should first of all devote a few remarks to that important subject which affects not only every individual soldier in all the various theatres of war, but is of deep and engrossing interest to every household in this country. I think I may lay claim on behalf of the War Office, and on behalf of the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in France that we have endeavoured during the last three months to make the question of leave more fair and more equitable than it has been made during any period of the War. I do not think that the grievance to-night has turned upon the question of leave so far as it concerns France and Flanders. I am hopeful, so far as that particular theatre of war is concerned, that at the end of next month there will not be a single soldier in that theatre of war who has been out there for more than twelve months without leave. When you consider the enormous difficulties with which the Government has had to contend in regard to transport, in regard to military exigencies, and the various other concomitants of a great War of this sort, that is highly creditable.

The one speech which was devoted entirely to the question of leave was made by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Colonel P. Williams), who, like all the other speakers, stated his case very fairly. Like all other members of the Committee, he has been receiving, particularly recently, a great number of letters from his constituency urging the Government and the War Office to give leave to soldiers as far as it can possibly give them leave. He asked me a very definite question. He asked me to be frank with the Committee and to tell them and the country whether it was possible or impossible to give leave to sol-

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diers who are serving in the distant theatres of war. I gave an answer to a question this afternoon dealing particularly with Mesopotamia. I then pointed out that we had done our level best to give as much leave as possible to the soldiers who have gallantly fought there in the most trying and difficult circumstances. We have given them leave to go to India, where the climate, especially in the hill country, is very much better. We have been very successful—at least, comparatively successful—in giving them leave to India, but I make bold to go so far as to say that it is practically impossible to give all soldiers or officers leave from Mesopotamia to this country at the present time. When you come to think of it, the reasons for that are not far to seek. First of all, there is the enormous difficulty of transport, and, secondly, there is the enormous difficulty which arises out of the length of time it takes for a man to get here and back and at the same time have his leave. The number of leaves that could be given would be hardly commensurate with the amount of ill-feeling which would obviously arise from the fact that hundreds, it might even be thousands of men might not have a chance, during the whole course of the War, of getting leave to this country. I am quite sure that the Committee does recognise, so far as Mesopotamia is concerned that there is tremendous difficulty in granting leave to this country. When a case does arise where there is extraordinary urgency in the home life of the soldier or officer, every possible attempt is made by the general commanding-in-chief out there, at the instigation of the War Office, to see that he should get leave to meet the extraordinary demands made upon him in his home life. I cannot honestly say that the War Office can go beyond that so far as Mesopotamia is concerned.

With regard to the less distant theatres of war in Egypt and Salonika the case is not so bad, but even there it is bad enough. The same difficulty so far as transport is concerned arises there. One knows of a soldier who has been at Alexandria for six whole weeks waiting for a transport to bring him home, and even then it was impossible for him to embark, and one knows that if a soldier gets leave from Salonika or Palestine, if he comes home he may not be able to get back in time, and if he does not get back

in time he endangers the leave of another soldier of the same or some other regiment. There are a thousand and one difficulties connected with questions of leave in the distant theatres of war, and we can only hope that these gallant soldiers and their gallant relatives at home who have so far endured all the hardships of these campaigns, in the one case by the actual rigours of war and in the other by their splendid endurance and patience at home, will try to consider that the difficulties are not raised gratuitously by the War Office or by the Government, but wilfully by our enemies upon the sea and by Nature. I need hardly say that if it were possible—I know I am speaking not only for the Secretary of State, but for every single member of the Army Council—in any way to ameliorate the lot of the private soldier by granting him leave, not as a matter of right but as a matter of privilege, we should most whole-heartedly give him any concession in that direction that we possibly could.

There is another point more or less affecting all the theatres of war which was raised at Question time to-day. I was asked whether it was the intention of the Government to give a chevron, to be worn on the uniform, to the soldiers who had gone out in 1914 to India. I had to say that the chevron had to be given to the troops who had gone to the theatres of war. I pointed out quite directly that India, for the purposes of a grant of a chevron, was not regarded as a theatre of war. The same question was asked by the hon. Member for Manchester in the Debate with regard to Egypt. I fancy the case there is different, and that the Army Council would hold that Egypt was a theatre of war. But with regard to India it has not so far been regarded as a theatre of war. No one recognises more than I the extraordinarily good services of the Territorials who at the very beginning of the War, when there was no obligation upon them to undertake foreign service, waived their right and took upon themselves foreign service of whatsoever sort of kind. It so happened that some Territorials, particularly men of Essex, Surrey, Kent and Devon, who had long before the War been in active preparation, were most anxious to go wherever fighting was possible, and it was only a direct order from the War Office that made them go to India instead of to France. I feel bound to express to the Army Council on the first possible occasion the very strong feeling

which I know is prevalent in this House that those Territorials should be regarded as coming within the term of the regulation which governs the grant of these chevrons.

Two very interesting speeches have been delivered by the hon. and gallant Gentleman (Major Lane-Fox)

9.0 P.M. and the hon. and gallant Gentleman (Major Wood). I

feel sure the House will have listened appreciatively to them because they were speaking not as advocates of something they had never seen or heard of or been present at, but something with which they had been in actual contact and knew at first hand. One point which they raised referred to the retransfer of troops from the regiment to which they were originally attached to some other regiment. I am quite prepared to say that no one in the War Office is or was anxious at any time that a man who has been associated from the beginning of the War down to the present time with one regiment should be sent to any other. But, as the House must recognise, the Army now is a national Army. Every unit is a fluid unit, and at any given moment any man in any particular battalion, whether an officer or a man, may have to be transferred to any other unit or battalion. There is no one who has a greater respect for the Territorial instinct than I have, and I am perfectly convinced that it was the Territorial instinct before the War, and for a long time after the War, which gave this country the power which it has and which inspires its troops to the gallantry which they have shown on many occasions. There is no doubt that a man who is fighting with men of his own unit, with the boys with whom he has played on the village green and under officers whom in civil life he has learned to respect, is a far better fighter than a man who is placed haphazard under the command of an officer he has never heard of or in association with men whose instincts and views are entirely different and apart. But I should like to reassure both hon. and gallant Gentlemen that if retransfers have taken place it has been for one reason only, because of the urgent necessity of military exigencies at the front. It is true that in one or two cases, with a little exercise of prudence and care by officers at the base, these men might have been placed back with their units instead of being sent to other units with whom they had no connection, Territorial

or other. I am not speaking now particularly for the War Office, but for my own Territorial regiment, and the letters which I have received all pointed to that fact. I made it my business, not as Under-Secretary for War, but as a common or garden Member of this House, to place my complaint before the authorities concerned, and they have done their level best since then to see that soldiers who had either been at the hospital or at the base and were ready for drafting into a regiment were sent back either to the particular regiment or to a regiment that had the same Territorial associations. I gather that the two hon. and gallant Gentlemen would not complain if something of that kind were guaranteed to them. If the soldiers in whom they are interested could not get back to their own particular regiments, if they got back to regiments associated in some degree to them, Territorial or otherwise, the difficulty might be in some way overcome.

Major WOOD: There is one point I should like made clear. As long as there are certain Cavalry units preserved in France, mounted, and as long as it is desired to maintain those units up to strength, it is most undesirable to allow men who have been wounded in the service of that unit, when they are cured, to drift into Infantry and get other new men into the Cavalry unit. There may be a good argument for dismounting the whole lot, but as long as you maintain it you should apply that principle.

Mr. MACPHERSON: I cannot object to the interruption of my hon. and gallant Friend. It seems to be a perfectly reasonable one, and if I can, as I hope to do tomorrow, bring it before the authorities concerned in this country in the hope that they may make representations abroad—for, after all, the main thing is abroad—I shall be most pleased to do so, and to say that it is the unanimous opinion of Members of this House.

Several points were raised by my Noble Friend (Lord H. Cavendish-Bentinck). One referred to separation allowances. That question is not particularly in my Department, but I will make a point of bringing this particular case before the financial authorities to-morrow, in the hope that it may be remedied. I gathered from the facts which my Noble Friend placed before the House that there was a case that ought to be looked into at once. The other point affected the Women's

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Army Auxiliary Corps. For my own part—I am not speaking officially, but I shall make it if possible official—I do think that if women take upon themselves certain obligations and conditions to go to France, or to any theatre of War, and to undertake work which might in other circumstances have to be undertaken by men, duly enlisted, I think that so far as possible, consistent, of course, with the interests of the taxpayer, those women should have the same rights as the men who have duly enlisted. If the question of pension does arise, and a pension would be due to a man because of the work which he has undertaken under military service in any theatre of war, I say that if a woman in the same category, doing the same class of work, is to become disabled, and she would be entitled to a pension in civilian life, I think that the Government might consider that a pension should be given to the woman in such circumstances. In regard to uniform, I am not quite sure whether I am speaking right, but my Noble Friend, who has served his country abroad, and others who have been abroad will correct me if I am wrong. I understand that there is only one uniform dealt out to a soldier when he goes to the front, and one pair of boots. The women of the Army Auxiliary Corps are no worse and no better off in this respect than an ordinary soldier. Probably they do not undertake work which would render it more possible that one pair of boots or shoes would be liable to waste quicker than a pair of boots allotted to a man. That is a matter which I am not so sure that I can recommend with the same power as I can recommend the first part of my Noble Friend's suggestion. However, it is a question which requires consideration, and I will make it my duty as soon as possible to consult the authorities concerned, and see whether anything can be done in the matter. If I have missed any point, I hope that any hon. Members concerned will bring the matter before me personally, and I will endeavour to have it rectified or remedied as best I can.

Before sitting down I should like to revert to the question of leave. I quite realise, as my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Colonel Penry Williams) said, that there is a great deal of inflammable material to which any unscrupulous politician might very well set fire, and the conflagration might mean a tremendous set back to the interests of this

country in the prosecution of the War. I think after the explanation which I have given—I hope the explanation will appeal to all fair-minded men—it ought to be the duty of every individual Member of this House to make it plain that the Government is anxious, the commanding officers at the front are anxious—it is not to their interests to have tired men—and everybody concerned is anxious to give leave; but distance is great and transport is difficult, and all the hundred and one difficulties which I have endeavoured to enumerate are all present, and it is not possible to overcome them. While we in France are doing our level best to recognise not only the extraordinary sacrifice and endurance of the men at the front, but also the extraordinary endurance and patience of the wives, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers of the men at home, there comes a state when it is absolutely impossible for us to promise what we cannot perform. As I have pointed out in the case of Mesopotamia, it is absolutely impossible for me to stand here and say that we can promise any appreciable amount of leave, either now or in the future, to any men who have been gallantly serving in that particular field of war.

Commander WEDGWOOD: Before I start on what must be the main subject of my speech to-night, namely, the imprisonment of Mr. Morel, I want to take the opportunity, while the Under-Secretary of State for War is present, to say a word or two about that branch of the Service with which I am intimately associated at the present time, namely, the Royal Flying Corps. The Royal Flying Corps undertakes what must be, I think, in this War, perhaps the most dangerous service of any arm of the Service, and it would be a thousand pities if the Royal Flying Corps became officered to any overwhelming extent, not by Englishmen, but by soldiers from the Dominions. I think there is a tendency in that direction at the present time. The ideal officers for the Royal Flying Corps are undoubtedly the boys from our public schools. If we can get the boys from our public schools into the Royal Flying Corps, they will have the necessary individual courage which is so essential a factor for success in individual fighting. I think the War Office might take some steps to recruit from the boys who are leaving our public schools. If they would get a man like Captain Bishop back from the Front to go round our public schools

and see what he could do in the way of getting recruits for the Flying Corps, it would be an enormous advantage to that force. Consider for a moment the difference between fighting as an infantry officer in a marching regiment, when you all have to go over the top together, and when you have to face death with your men around you, and the question of having to take enormous risks and face death as individual entities in the air, when, and human nature being what it is, you can avoid danger and nobody know it.

What we want is to have people in the Flying Corps who will not avoid danger because nobody is there to report what they have done. It is vitally important that men should not drop bombs miles from a town, and it is of vital importance that where there is a Boche to be sent down, that he should be sent down, and that the voyage home should not be taken before it is absolutely necessary. That is one of the reasons why I think you ought to get the very pick of this nation to join the Flying Corps, because you have to rely upon the individual there more than in any other branch of the Service. The question of rewards comes in in the same way. I do not believe I should have the courage to fight a single-handed combat in the middle air, 10,000 feet above the ground, but when these people do carry out these combats and do bring down a Boche, I do not think there is any reward that can be too high. If a member of the Flying Corps brings down, and is proved to have brought down, an enemy plane, I think that he should receive not a decoration, but a knighthood, as in the old time of Edward III., who singled out men who actually did perform triumphs of that sort in the most marked way. At the present time I believe you have to bring down a certain number of Boches before you get the Military Cross, and a certain further number before you get the Victoria Cross. Anyone with any imagination whatever must know that to bring down a single Boche plane 10,000 feet above the earth is worthy of the highest decoration that the King can give for such an act of gallantry. By increasing the rewards in that way, and by recruiting from the best classes in the country in our public schools, I believe that you would get far more valuable results from our Flying Corps than you do even at the present time, and goodness knows that our men

are good enough at the present time. Get the best possible material, both by recruiting and by an adequate system of reward, and you will improve the stamina of the whole Corps. Another thing: The mechanics ought to be improved as far as possible. I admit that there has been a great improvement in the mechanics of the Royal Flying Corps. Still they are not up to the mechanics of the R.N.A.S., and steps ought to be taken to see that both arms of the Service are put on an equal footing so far as the efficiency of the mechanics is concerned, because upon the mechanics depend the safety of the aviators themselves.

Having said that word about the Flying Corps, and seeing the Home Secretary now present, I will state what has really caused me to come here to-day. I have already written to the Prime Minister and to the Home Secretary. It seems to me, though I am by no means a pacifist, that it is a real national disgrace that we have put Mr. E. D. Morel into prison. It is a national disgrace for three separate and distinct reasons, every one of which seems to me to call for special notice in this House. In the first place, who is Mr. E. D. Morel? He is a man of French birth who came to this country when he was about ten years of age, and left school, I think Bedford School, when he was fifteen, a poor boy inadequately educated, as you might say. He went into Elder, Dempster's office in Liverpool. While there and while a mere boy still he grasped the fact that all was not going well with the Congo State, a State which, as hon. Members know, comprises over one-fifth of the whole of the African Continent, and is inhabited by 20,000,000 blacks. He gradually became aware that the state of affairs was intolerable, and although he was absolutely penniless, being merely a clerk in Elder, Dempster's office, and against the wishes of his employer, he began to agitate to improve the position of the natives there. It is a wonderful history, how that man, without any means, without any support, gradually worked up this country and Belgium and the United States of America into making a sufficient protest against the inhuman treatment of the natives in the Congo, so that in the end, after twelve years of loyalty, of devoted and unselfish work for the blacks in the Congo State, he finally broke the rule of King Leopold and put Belgian Congo on

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a sound footing. It was one of the most marvellous occurrences, I think, of the twentieth century. I do not remember any similar case in our history of one man creating such an enormous change in the government of a great number of people in this world, a man with no advantages whatever.

It is unnecessary for me to say here to-day how the House of Commons gradually came to realise the state of affairs. In 1903, I think, we carried, through his efforts, the first unanimous resolution denouncing the state of affairs in the Congo Free State, and it was in 1911 that all the dignitaries of the churches and the members of every political party, with Mr. Vandervelde, the leader of the great Socialist party in Belgium, and people like Mark Twain, all came together in the most public and emphatic manner to thank E. D. Morel for his wonderful services to humanity. Where are those friends now? E. D. Morel has become unpopular. But because he is unpopular I think it would be a disgrace to our country for all those who supported him when he was triumphant to forget, like the magistrate who sent him to prison, or Bodkin who prosecuted him, the debt of gratitude which the world owes to this man, who was the last person who should be treated with the indignity that has been thrown upon him by the British Government. At the risk of tiring the House, I would like to quote one or two things that have been said about Mr. Morel by people whom we all regard as being high and noble characters. Mr. Vandervelde, who has taken such an active part in the work of preparing for the resuscitation of Belgium, says:

"To-day we salute Mr. Morel, the organiser of victory; he who was always striving while others slept; he who compelled the blind to see and the deaf to hear; he who has saved the peoples of the Congo by appealing incessantly and indefatigably to the conscience of the civilised world. We thank him in the name of Belgium. We thank him in the name of the natives."

Everybody who knows the history of that problem will agree that he deserves those thanks. Then take the Archbishop of Canterbury:

"To Mr. Morel this country, and tens of thousands outside this country, owe a debt of gratitude larger than they can ever repay—"

—and now they are repaying it—

"for the strenuous years of devotion and self-sacrifice on behalf of what is righteous, just and true."

Then we have Sir A. Canon Doyle, a political opponent, who has the courage to write to the Home Secretary and pro-

test against his imprisonment. The right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Runciman), with any number of other hon. Members of this House, have all in times past registered the debt of gratitude which we owe to Mr. E. D. Morel. I ask them to come forward now and to take their part in obtaining his release.

But I knew Morel, perhaps, more intimately, not so much over the Congo as over other native affairs in West Africa. For two years he sat with me on a Committee dealing with the natives of West Africa. Being a man whose total income I suppose never exceeded £400 a year, and with a wife and four children, who could ill afford the time, at the request of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, he devoted his time to this Committee, often sitting twice a week, investigating a matter which involved an enormous amount of additional work in the evenings, and during these two years he sat on that Committee and worked much harder than I ever worked, though I myself am not a slacker in those matters, doing that valuable work not only to protect the interests of the natives, but, at the request of the Colonial Office in this country. That is all passed over as of no importance whatever, and this man is sentenced to six months' imprisonment, and for what? E. D. Morel has got strong views on secret diplomacy, and he writes a brochure entitled "Czardom During the War" and he sends it to a fellow-writer, who is possibly known to Members in this House though he is absolutely unknown to the magistrate and to Mr. Bodkin—Monsieur Romain Rolland, the author of a series of novels which are fairly well known to people in educated society. M. Rolland unfortunately happens to be in Switzerland, and E. D. Morel arranged with Miss Sidgwick, another well-known writer, to convey his brochure clandestinely to Switzerland to M. Rolland. What a horrible crime! It is illegal under "Dora," but is it the sort of crime for which to inflict a punishment of six months' imprisonment upon a man who has deserved the gratitude of the entire world? The reptile Press has hounded E. D. Morel for a whole year, pointed out his French origin and charged him with being paid by Germany. It is not enough that you should punish this man for a trifling offence of this sort with six months' imprisonment after his services to the whole of humanity, when you con-

sider how the case was supported by the Home Office. They opened his letters and obtained photographs of them. They did not like to bring photographs of letters into Court, and they searched Morel's house for the original letters, and, as they could not find them, they had to produce these photographs of private letters in Court. The letters of E. D. Morel were opened by them and photographed, and then the letters were gummed down again so that nobody should know anything about what had been done. They come into Court with the photographed letters, and they bring two distinct persons to substantiate the crime that he had sent one pamphlet to M. Romain Rolland, in Switzerland. Of all the cases supported by the most monstrous conduct, I think is undoubtedly pre-eminent in British history. That we should punish as a crime an act of that sort supported by such evidence and with six months' imprisonment of a man to whom we owe the greatest debt of gratitude, is a blot upon English history and English traditions. A man may be black if you like, but you have no right to put him into prison because you do not like his views. A man may have actually committed a crime, but surely you will judge of the blackness of the crime in comparison with the whiteness of the man's record. I am proud of my country and her traditions and history, but the imprisonment of E. D. Morel will go to succeeding generations as one of the most serious blots on the history of this country.

Sir RICHARD COOPER: I cannot pretend to follow the hon. and learned Member who has just sat down. It is difficult to understand the mind of a man who, on the one hand, has rendered such manly and gallant services to his country in the War, while, on the other, he stands up in this House to defend the action of a man who has been systematically engaged in work which I think the vast majority will recognise as the greatest crime that could be committed in this country, being one which had for its purpose the assisting of our enemies.

Commander WEDGWOOD: It is not a crime in England to express views, and it will be a bad day for us when it is.

Sir R. COOPER: Quite true, but I rose on this occasion to raise the question of enemy aliens, a subject which I have very often raised in the past, although latterly seems to have fallen out of favour

in this House, but I do venture to suggest that outside this House there is at least as much, if no more anxiety as to the situation in this country as regards enemy aliens than there has been in the past. There are three reasons why that is so. In the first place we know that our naturalisation laws in this country, whilst possibly satisfactory in times of peace, do not serve the best interests of the United Kingdom in time of war. The late Home Secretary in June, 1916, when speaking on this subject used these words:

"In my own view I do not think it is right that we should naturalise people as British subjects, while, at the same time, they retain their allegiance to a foreign State."

With regard to the naturalisation laws I have only one remark to make. While there are people who before the War were naturalised as British subjects, a certain number of enemy aliens have been naturalised since the War broke out, and the moment the Government naturalised those people during the period of the War, they knew that those aliens first owed allegiance, not to His Majesty King George, but to His Imperial Majesty the Kaiser. It is very hard to understand why the Government during three years of the period of the War has left these naturalised aliens untouched. There is now a favourable opportunity, which the Government should embrace, to alter not only the naturalisation laws, but to alter the status of aliens generally in this country, so that they will not have the same facilities after the War is concluded that they have got before. After we have made peace, and we hope the day will soon arrive, if we do not alter the naturalisation laws now, and if we do not deal with the real interests of British citizens by controlling more closely the peaceful penetrations of Germans and other people, then when peace has been concluded, and we ask that these naturalisation laws shall be dealt with—for it will be just as important then as now—we shall be told that we have made peace with our enemy, that the situation is delicate, that the subject could not be dealt with at that moment, and probably not for some time, and that it would not be diplomatic to raise the subject. For that reason I submit that it is necessary that the present opportunity should be embraced by His Majesty's Government to make changes in our naturalisation laws, so as not only now, but later, to help Great Britain and the Empire. The second reason, which I think still keeps alive anxiety in the public mind

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on this problem, is the tardy manner in which the Government has been winding up enemy businesses. Why that should be the case it is very difficult to understand. The Government should wind up enemy businesses and get rid of goodwill, patents, and trade marks, they should try now to do this work thoroughly, and not merely in a half-hearted way. At present they are only half doing the work. There is the case of the German named Kammer, who was carrying on a business which the Government wound up. He had two daughters, and these two daughters are carrying on the same business as F. and B. Kammer. The regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act, under which the Government is operating, probably do not enable the Government to take legal action. If that be so, the Government should alter our laws at once, so as to fulfil the object that alien interests shall not be allowed to continue after the war. But my great problem is the internment of alien enemies. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, on the adjournment in August, when I raised this question in a very mild form, gave the general assurance that everything possible was being done. In what I am going to say I do not wish to utter anything that would throw doubt on the fact that the right hon. Gentleman, within his knowledge, and to the best of his ability, is doing all he reasonably can. During this year many new events have happened in different parts of the world that have compelled the English people to think very differently on the rights of aliens and alien enemies and the freedom they enjoy under our laws in this country. We have had the information from the American Government with regard to a well-known German Consul in South America, who received a message from the German Government that Argentine ships were to be sunk and no trace left of them. We have had many disclosures made recently by the United States Government relating to the activities of spies in that and other countries. We have seen the result of the penetration into Russia of the German spy system, which has upset an enormous Empire. There are events happening in Paris right up to this date of a very significant character showing the enormous power even to-day that Germany has in the heart of the city of Paris. We have got, unhappily, events more recent than that to which I will make no further allusion, and those are

the recent events in Italy, in which we have reason to suspect at least that the German spy system has played a greater part than great generals and great armies themselves.

The German spy system, we know to-day if we did not know it a year ago, is deep, thorough, scientific, and more powerful in some cases than armies of millions of men. Is anybody going to suggest that this deep system of spying, which has been worked by the German people for years before the War as one of their most potent weapons, has been applied to every country in the world save that of the United Kingdom? I read some little time ago a speech by the Minister of the Interior in the Union Government of South Africa dealing with the same subject. He exposed there some of the facts that had been elicited from the inquiries and investigations that had been carried on by the Union Government with reference to enemy aliens, on the Rand. He gave instances and quotations from enemy alien witnesses, who admitted when they were interrogated that they had been sent by the German Government out to the Rand for the purpose, primarily, of acting as spies and serving the interests of the German nation. I understand that the Home Office now and in the past, in dealing with this problem of enemy aliens, has acted on the principle that no action can be taken against them until they have done something improper. The Home Secretary, in a statement recently, said, "I can only intern them on the ground of some improper conduct on their part."

The SECRETARY of STATE for the HOME DEPARTMENT (Sir George Cave): I was referring to British subjects.

Sir R. COOPER: If a British subject has done something wrong and against the interests of the country, why do you not try him for treason? If a British subject maliciously does something against the interests of the country he is guilty of high treason and ought to be shot, and there should be no question of internment. I would like to ask this question: Do our enemies during his terrible War act on the same principle that we are acting? Are there 13,000 English males in Germany and Austria moving about freely? And I suppose with their womenfolk we have 25,000 enemy aliens in this country who are not at present interned, every one of them owing allegiance to their Kaiser. We know from recent history

that the vast majority of them are good German citizens who will lose no opportunity of fulfilling their allegiance to their Kaiser. Are there five Englishmen who are enemy aliens in Germany freely moving about as they desire? I should be very much surprised if there were. The Home Secretary knows, and I may be wrong when I come down to such a fine point, but I do not believe that the German Government would allow even five; and I venture to suggest that they do not allow thousands of British men and women perfect freedom to move about in Germany at the present time. On what ground, in war-time, do we suppose that those 25,000 are trustworthy and can be reasonably trusted not to do anything whatever against the interests of His Majesty's Government? We know from many experiences in this War that our enemies will stick at nothing to win their ends. Scruple and morality have no rule in their minds. Who knows at what moment some dastardly game may be set in action by the German Government to take advantage of our trust in those people and of our simplicity? I say it is a grave danger to the State that so many enemy aliens are allowed at the present time to be at large. What information do we suppose those people are trying at least to convey to their own country about events that are going on here? Hundreds of fires and explosions which cannot be accounted for have happened in this country. What has been the experience of the United States in this same way, and what has been published freely by the United States of the deep activities of so many German agents in their own country?

I will take in this connection one broad point alone where I at any rate—I wish I could think wrongly—but whether rightly or wrongly, feel that certain enormous damage has been done to the interests of everybody in this country through the aliens that are at large—I refer to our shipping. There was a meeting quite recently at Cardiff, where a well-known citizen, Sir Edward Nichol, speaking of what was happening in that part of the world, said that the Germans are all around the docks from Bristol to Swansea, and ought to be interned. I have had a great deal of information given to me, which I have every reason to believe accurate, from shipowners on the Tyne, and which suggests that daily messages are going to submarines that are operating

off the Tyne. I put this matter to the Home Secretary, if he wishes to test the value of what I am saying: During September the submarines were able to pick out boats newly built and to sink them out of face, leaving the older boats untouched. I cannot help feeling that that information is at any rate worthy of very serious consideration by His Majesty's Government. If the Government were only determined to tackle this problem, and start by intern-ing all enemy aliens, and put Scotland Yard on the track, they would soon get to the bottom of this problem. It is principally through enemy aliens, I feel sure, that the submarines operating round our coasts get such extraordinarily accurate knowledge of what ships are leaving and the time they leave. Commanders of submarines have complained to captains of ships which they have stopped and examined, "Why are you late?" Some of the commanders of the submarines have known what has been the goods that these vessels have carried. They have even known in what part of the ship the goods which were only put there a couple of days before were. I will not carry that argument any further. One more point: I think I am correct in saying that there are between fifty and sixty British steamers that have gone down, of which the Admiralty possess no trace whatever. Nobody will suggest that it was spies in this country alone that always did this; but it was spies in this country and in other parts of the Atlantic; and at least there is no doubt that enemy aliens, people working in the German spy system, have taken action which has ended in the disappearance of the vessels at sea.

I will turn from the generalities that I have touched upon to take two concrete cases. First, I will take the case of Laszlo. I have been looking up what has been said officially in regard to this man, and I have been struck by the fact that the Home Secretary has given us very much more free and frank information about him than I have found has been given by any of his predecessors on any previous important matter of this kind which has been raised at Question time. Laszlo is a British subject. For three years he has been trusted by the authorities. After three years something happened. We do not quite know what it is. I think the right hon. Gentleman has given some information, but it does not matter.

[Sir R. Cooper.]

After three years something happened, and the Government came to the conclusion that this man must be interned. I ask again if, being a British citizen, he has done something that justifies his being interned as he has been, why is he not tried for high treason, and if found guilty shot? But there has, we understand, been a promise made in this case which is not usual, at any rate, in regard to other interned prisoners. He has been promised that his case will be reconsidered in December. This man is a British subject, and I must ask this question: Is there grave doubt as to whether he ought to be interned or not. If there is you may have the hon. and gallant Gentleman the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme making a much more violent speech on Laszlo some months hence than he has made to-night in relation to Mr. Morel. Has the Government evidence that Laszlo ought to be interned? If so, if he is guilty, why is the case to be reconsidered in December, though the War may go on for two or three years longer? It is impossible for anyone who feels strongly about this problem of enemy aliens not to ask a question as to whether there is some mysterious influence protecting this particular man. I am perfectly certain that my right hon. Friend, at any rate, would be no party to anything of the kind.

I mentioned earlier this evening what has happened in Paris up to date. Let me just give by way of contrast to this case of Laszlo what the French people have done under similar circumstances. There was a very famous dancing woman, Mati Hara, a Javanese by birth. During the War she has been in London, Paris, Madrid, Berlin, and so on during military operations. A fortnight ago the French authorities got hold of her. They shot her. She was a spy. She was responsible for giving information to the Germans—I know what the information was, but it is perhaps best not to say it—but information which did have a disadvantageous effect upon British military operations in Flanders. Nobody will suggest that the French have not as deep a respect for womenkind as have the British people; but if the French nation has been driven to take a step like that where the person was found, red-handed, to have done the greatest harm to the cause of the Allies, surely it is not asking anything very terrible, nor is it an extraordinary view

to take, that enemy aliens in this country should not be allowed at large at this time! There is one other point about Laszlo that ought not to be overlooked while I am speaking about him. Laszlo was, at any rate, amongst other things, responsible for using the dispatch bag of a neutral Minister. I am not going to suggest who the Minister was, but I am going to put this point—it may be unreasonable—but I would mention that an identical case happened in the United States, and the Government gave the people there the whole facts of the case, and mentioned the names of the Ministers where they could possibly do so. I am making this reference for the purpose of suggesting, as I did only last week, that I believe His Majesty's Government is making a great mistake by this long-continued system of secrecy about everything of public interest. It is not the system that is followed in the United States. Every Member of this House knows as well as I do that rumours are poured into our ears outside day by day, and I do suggest to the Government that their policy of secrecy is carried too far. It would be better—within their discretion, of course—to be a little more frank with the public. If they did so, I think it would remove a most powerful influence by which German agents spread rumours to undermine our purpose and our views on the War.

I want to take my last case—one which I have raised several times in this House, and upon which I have twice been, I think, deliberately turned down. Otherwise, I do not think I would have referred to it to-night, except by way of illustration. In my humble judgment it does to me indicate broadly what are the evils of the system of dealing with alien and other enemies. I speak of the case of Dr. Markel. I am going to ask the Home Secretary if he will after to-night make a special effort to satisfy himself by the evidence there is as to whether what I have said before in this House and to-night is genuine or not. I dealt with this matter last in June, 1916. I stated on that occasion that an order had been sent out from the Home Office, signed by the then Home Secretary, and countersigned by two distinguished military officers at the War Office, to the police in Kensington that Dr. Markel was not to be watched or reported upon. The then Home Secretary said that no instructions had been issued by the Home Office that Dr. Markel should not be observed by the police. I asked the

Attached by his Dr. Cooper

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same question on Monday last, and the right hon. Gentleman replied that he could not find any such instructions were given, and that Dr. Markel was a British subject, having been naturalised in 1889, and was not interned. I have here a confidential proof that this instruction was given. I am going to offer it to the right hon. Gentleman. As it is confidential, I know he will treat it as such, and return it to me later on. I say again that that instruction was given, and that twice in this House Home Secretaries have been misled by important officials, upon whom they depend for their information, on the facts of this particular case.

We do not hear very much, happily, in these days in this House about the hidden hand. It is an expression which defines something we cannot understand. The idea is that there is something at work—whether it be a person or persons—but there is something at work, and has been at work from the day the War began, which is operating in a manner that is not to the advantage of the interests of the Allies. I have in my mind accused—and I feel sorry for it—Ministers of doing certain things. But to-day I begin to think that Ministers are much more often than we know the victims of permanent officials, and that that will explain many things which we have so often brought forward without getting a satisfactory answer. I cannot help feeling that Ministers are not so much at fault as we have been trying to regard them, and I cannot believe that there is something—I certainly do not believe there is wilfully wrong action on the part of permanent officials—but there is something in the system of our Civil Service in this connection which does make them very much more lax than they ought to be. In this particular case I have my proofs, and I cannot help expressing my belief that there is something more at work. Otherwise, why should important officials at the Home Office deliberately mislead two Home Secretaries on this important matter? But things are worse than that. Not only was this order given a long time ago, at the beginning of the War, not only has its issue been twice denied in this House, but the case of Dr. Markel has been under consideration by Scotland Yard some time this year, and although an official decision was not arrived at, I do know that those who inquired into it were driven to the conclusion that there was something wrong and that something ought to be

done other than what has been done hitherto. But something happened after that. Not only was no action

10.0 p.m. taken, but there was an Order issued to the Kensington Police that Dr. Markel was neither to be watched nor reported on. That Order was confirmed some time in the summer of 1917. I believe the case was considered by Scotland Yard in March or April last. I admit I do not know the exact date. Dr. Markel, I may tell the House again, is a German. He was naturalised in 1889, and since the beginning of the War he has held special permission from the War Office to visit enemy camps throughout this country. He enters freely all prohibited areas. I make this statement, and in so doing I am probably giving the right hon. Gentleman an admirable opportunity of undermining what I am saying. I repeat again, that until recently, at any rate, Dr. Markel had permission to visit enemy camps in Scotland and in England. I do not want to delay the House on this particular question. I have given the right hon. Gentleman sufficient information on that point. What I want now to do is to appeal to him—and it is very unpleasant to have to raise these matters regarding enemy aliens, but they are exercising the minds of the people throughout this country. I want to appeal to the right hon. Gentleman to give this question further consideration. I believe that those who answer questions in this House, those who have the direction of affairs, are not given the best guidance and advice from the officials who are paid to serve them. I believe there is something wrong in the system. We are still at war, and we do not know what danger may come from these uninterned aliens. I am anxious to do everything in my power to urge the right hon. Gentleman to satisfy himself absolutely that I am wrong, and that sufficient care is being taken in regard to alien enemies to protect the best interests of the United Kingdom. I am going to conclude with a remark which I made earlier, that whatever may be the circumstances of this matter at the present time under conditions of war, there is urgent need that His Majesty's Government should consider very carefully, and quickly whether before peace is declared, they cannot take steps to put an end to this peaceful penetration by Germany, and to secure that after the War this country shall not be open to the Germans, to carry on these practices

Mr. CARADOC REES: The Home Secretary will correct me if I am wrong, but I think I am justified in saying that in regard to this matter the Home Office action is more stringent than the hon. Member thinks. It is possible to intern men not merely on proof, but on suspicion only. If there is a suspicion that a man is friendly with hostile associations he can be interned; therefore the Government are far more stringent than the hon. Member, who is asking that aliens shall be shot if they are found doing something wrong.

Sir R. COOPER: I suggested that they ought to be taken into custody.

Mr. REES: And shot if there was proof against them. If, on the other hand, you have no proof, but you have suspicion, then they can be interned by the Government. Surely it is not possible to ask for more than that. Do not let us run away with the idea that the Government and its officials are a set of blockheads who do not understand their business, or that every Government one after another is of that kind; otherwise let the hon. Gentlemen form a Government themselves, and they would then fall under the same suspicion. Very often a man is allowed to be free even though there is suspicion. Supposing the hon. Gentleman knew a man in this country who was getting information from the enemy, would he grab him? No, he would watch him. Do not let people believe all the time that if they hear of somebody here or there doing this or that, that the Government are not watching him and getting perhaps more value by allowing him his freedom than by shutting him up at once.

General CROFT: How can the Government watch 13,000?

Mr. REES: Thirteen thousand, including the children.

General CROFT: No; males.

Mr. REES: The hon. Gentleman spoke about the 13,000 as if they were free to move about anywhere. They are not; they are all restricted. I should like to say one word on the Vote of Credit. It seems to me that when the Chancellor of the Exchequer wants money from this House he comes here and we say: "We are going to give you a big lecture before we give you any more on your misdeeds with the money which has been voted in the past, and you must do better in the future." There is one point that has

been troubling me, and perhaps every Member of the House. Are we able to bear the burden of the huge debt that is growing so largely and rapidly, and will we be able to do so if it goes on for a year, or for two or three years to come? I have been trying to get hold of some facts that would lead me to some kind of a conclusion, and what I would like to submit is that instead of looking back to four years ago let us look back to 100 years ago. Over 100 years ago the National Debt of this country was £902,000,000, and the country at that time bore that debt and came through. What are the comparable facts which we ought to take, then and now, to see what is the debt we can bear now? The income, I take it, at that time and at the present time ought to be taken. When we had a National Debt of over £900,000,000 the total income of this country was £250,000,000 per annum. The total income of the country now is £2,500,000,000 per annum; or ten times more than a hundred years ago. I think it is gratifying that although we hope the debt may not go up to £9,000,000,000 or £10,000,000,000, if it does we shall not be carrying a greater proportion than we did a hundred years ago. There is this additional point. One hundred years ago, when the National Debt was £900,000,000, the United States had left this Empire with hatred and enmity; Canada had hardly begun to develop; Australia and New Zealand were only beginning; South Africa, as we know it to-day, was only a name; and India was attached to this country by the very slenderest thread. It was in these circumstances that we started with that huge debt over a hundred years ago, came through, and built up and brought together another Empire. At the end of this War, instead of starting in this way, we shall have in Canada, with her people and her resources, a country that will outstrip probably in a few years nearly every nation in Europe; we shall have Australia and New Zealand rapidly developing and progressing places; we shall have in South Africa, with the reunion that has gone on and with the Colonies that will be joined to her a country that will be great before a generation has passed; and we shall have had in India what might have been expected, great loyalty, and although that was an expected loyalty it is gratifying to know that it came freely and willingly. Above and beyond all this the hatred and enmity of America one hundred

years ago will have been wiped out once and for all. She is friendly and working in alliance with us, and we shall start, when the War is over, not with the enmity, but with the esteem, respect, and affection of every nation in the whole world—esteem and affection that is worth having.

Sir G. CAVE: I wish to reply to the two speeches in which comment was made upon the action of my Department, and I should like to put before the House at once what I have to say in answer to them. I will refer first to the remarks of my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyme (Commander Wedgwood) with regard to Mr. Morel. He pronounced a glowing eulogy upon his friend, Mr. Morel, which I have no doubt was heard with pleasure by others who are also his friends. It is not my business in any way to decry or belittle the services which are said to have been rendered by Mr. Morel to the natives of the Congo State. Mr. Morel has broken the law of this country, and he is now paying the penalty imposed upon him. It would not be right for me to say one word in derogation of good work he may have done in past time! I am willing to believe that in past times he used an able pen in a good cause. He has since used it, as I believe, in a bad cause, and used it in a bad cause not only before but during the War. For the moment, however, neither use of his pen seems to me to be a material matter. Mr. Morel broke a law which was passed for the protection of this country in the War. He broke it knowingly, knowing what the law was, and intending to evade it. He attempted secretly to convey matter out of this country which, rightly or wrongly, was regarded as injurious to the interests of this country. His prosecution was not undertaken by me. I knew nothing of it until I saw the results in the paper, and the comments which my hon. and gallant Friend has chosen to make upon the action of the Home Office are entirely unjustified and misplaced. I know, as he knows, that the breach of the law is not denied, that it is indeed admitted by him, and it was within the competence of the Court, without any guidance from me, to determine what penalty Mr. Morel had incurred.

Commander WEDGWOOD: Was no one consulted before the prosecution?

Sir G. CAVE: The Home Office was not consulted. I understand the prosecution

was undertaken in the ordinary way, as is done in ninety-nine cases in every hundred, by the police in the ordinary exercise of their duties. My Department was not consulted, although I am not in the least saying that the police acted otherwise than properly. The magistrate was entitled to take into account the character of the accused, and I assume he bore that in mind. At all events he considered it and the penalty, so far as we know, was perfectly properly imposed by the magistrate. I do not see that there is any use at all in discussing the matter, a matter of the simple operation of the criminal law. It seems to me that many of hon. and gallant Friend's epithets, so far as they are condemnatory of my Department or of others, are entirely misplaced. I had better not say anything more about Mr. Morel. Many of us, I know, have our own opinions of him one way or the other; but, so far as I know, the general opinion of Mr. Morel has not entered into the matter—certainly it has not with me, or I believe anybody else, and I think it is hardly fair to Mr. Morel that I should endeavour to take away from the commendation of my hon. and gallant Friend as to the character of Mr. Morel, who is now undergoing the penalty for his offence, which, I want to repeat, was a very serious one in war-time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall (Sir R. Cooper) made a series of comments upon the action of the Government with regard to enemy aliens. He dealt first of all with the laws of naturalisation, and he quoted—I have no doubt quite correctly—from a speech which was made by me some time last year:

Sir R. COOPER: By your predecessor.

Sir G. CAVE: At all events, I agree with what was said, and I agree that the law needs amending—in fact, the law is to be amended. A Committee has sat upon the matter and has made its Report. Proposals have been actually made and put into the form of a Bill. Proposals have been sent out to our Dominions, who have a direct interest in the matter of naturalisation, especially since the passing of the Act of 1914, and I hope before long I shall have their reply and that I shall be able at no distant date to deal with what is an important matter, and which may, I think, be dealt with during the War. On that matter, therefore, there is no difference at all between my hon. Friend and myself. Then he referred

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shortly to the tardy windin-up of enemy companies. There, also, at all events, my withers are unwrung, because I took, if I remember rightly, a very active part—in fact, I took the principal part—in conducting through this House the Act under which those companies can be wound up. The actual administration of the Act is in the hands of the Board of Trade. I have no doubt they do their work admirably, and they have wound up a large number of companies in which there are enemy aliens. It is not a simple thing to do. It is not so simple as hon. Gentlemen sometimes think. In winding up a company you may affect British interests, and affect them very seriously indeed. But the work is performed by skilled men—generally by skilled accountants—who take control of these companies, get in their assets, pay their debts, and put an end to them as soon as may be. A great many companies have been wound up in that way. My hon. Friend only referred to one case—the partnership of two British subjects who bear the name of their father, an enemy alien. If the partnership of the two daughters to whom he referred is in any sense the business of the father, it may be dealt with at once by the Board of Trade. If the father has an interest in it at all, his interest may be dealt with by the Board of Trade. Whether they are dealing with it or not I really do not know, but I have not the least doubt that if they can prove that Mr. Kammer has anything to do with the business of his daughters they will take the proper action. That is the only instance my hon. Friend gave connected with this matter, and I venture to think he has not made out any case of delay against the Department by which the matter is dealt with.

My hon. Friend went on to a matter of wider interest, the question of spies in this country. It is a question rather difficult to discuss in public. I think most people know that, although there are, or were, a considerable number of German spies in this country, the most dangerous kind, because the most difficult to detect, have not been German spies or, indeed, enemy aliens at all. I only want to add that our detective system, both military and civil, has resulted in perfectly admirable work. I have seen something during the last ten months of both systems. I cannot, of course, go into any detailed description of their work, but I

have formed the very highest opinion of it, and I have complete confidence in the manner in which they do their work. My hon. Friend referred to the question of the internment of enemy aliens. I do not know whether he is an advocate of the phrase which is sometimes used, "Intern them all."

Sir R. COOPER: Yes; every one of them!

Sir G. CAVE: That is a phrase which is very often used by persons who, unlike my hon. Friend opposite, know very little about the matter. At the beginning of the War there was no internment system at all. In 1915 the Government of that day framed a policy under which alien enemies are interned unless cause is shown to the contrary, and a large number of those who are actually or technically enemy aliens, and still at liberty, constitute the residue of the aliens after the policy of the Government of that day had been applied. Let me remind my hon. Friend that in every one of these cases there has been consideration, not in my time, but in 1915, when the policy was laid down when all these cases were considered. Interned enemy aliens are of two classes. The first is those who technically are of alien blood but in fact are a friendly race, people who, like the Czechs and Poles, who are technically Austrian or German subjects, but who, in fact, are bitter enemies of Austria and Germany. These men make up a great proportion of the number. Each one of them is vouched for by a committee of fellow subjects of his own, and care is taken to check the statements made by them in every possible way.

Let me put this case. Take the case of an Alsatian, born in Alsace, devoted to France, who saw his country in 1871 torn from France and who had the choice of either becoming, against his will, a subject of Germany or of migrating out of France to this country, and he came here. Nobody would say that that man, although technically a German subject, ought to be interned. It seems to me that that would be a very foolish thing to do. These Alsations—and the same is true of the Czechs and many others—are friends of this country, but bitter enemies of our enemies, and willing and anxious to do anything they can to help us in this War. To say that we should shut these men up during the War is perfect folly, and anyone who knows the facts will not disagree with that statement. That gets rid of

a very large number. Many of the remainder—I put aside minor points—are people too old or ill to work or to do anybody any harm, blind men, persons in asylums, and people of that kind. There, again, is a class of men it would be ridiculous to intern. When I speak of internment, of course I include repatriation, because the rule is to intern enemy aliens of military age and to repatriate enemy aliens who are over military age. It would be not only cruel, but quite useless to intern those invalids and old people. Then I come to the last class worth mentioning. They are enemy aliens who have never been naturalised here; but who in many ways have proved their friendship for this country. There are some Germans and there are more Austrians who are in every way friendly to this country. There are Germans who have lived here thirty-five, forty and fifty years, but who have not taken the step of naturalisation, men who have married British wives, who have British-born children, who have sons who are voluntarily fighting for us in this War, and who have lost sons killed in this War. I know many such cases. I have investigated very many. Take a case of that kind. Would you intern a man whose son is risking his life for us in the War? Do you want him shut up? I do not think that anybody would say "Yes," in answer to that question. The policy of "intern them all" breaks down wherever you investigate it. I have had cases in my own time in which it has been thought right to order them to go back to Germany, and in which the men have had such a dislike to going back to that country that they have taken their own lives. Two cases of suicide, I regret to say, have occurred within the last two months. I do not think that the order was wrong, but the fact is sufficient to show that there are genuine cases where people are more attached to this country than to their own. I mention those classes, but I want to say that my rule is internment in every case unless there is the very strongest reason to the contrary. I do not think that it would be right to intern the whole of them *en bloc*. They had their cases decided two years ago; they have done nothing to show that the decision was wrong, and it would be unfair to make an order all round to intern every man. The rule is internment or repatriation in every case investigated, and the man concerned has the burden put upon him of making out his case

for exemption. Every case in my time, and I have no doubt in the time of my predecessors, has been referred to the police for a special report. Every enemy alien has to be registered. He is forbidden to move more than five miles from his residence. He has to get leave whenever he does, and to report himself wherever he goes. He is, in every way, under surveillance by the police. That enables them to watch the man's conduct and proceedings, and to make a report upon them. In every one of these cases I have had a report from the police about the doings of the man. In every case, whenever they or anybody in the House or anybody outside the House has called attention to an alien, I have had the case specially attended to and reported upon. I do not say that the system is perfect, I do not say that anybody can vouch for every one of these persons, but so far as any system can go, this system has been well thought out and probably has the best results that any system could have. The last breach of the law, the least suspicion that attaches to these men, has at once the result I have mentioned, and I do not think anybody could expect better results to be attained.

So far, with regard to the general question. My hon. Friend dealt with two specific instances, first, with that of Mr. Laszlo. I found myself in some difficulty in ascertaining exactly what my hon. Friend's complaint was. He asks why was not Mr. Laszlo tried for treason? I gave the answer in this House the other day—because we had not in our possession enough evidence to convict him. If a man be a British subject, I do not see that anybody can be blamed if he is not tried for treason when there is not evidence enough to convict him of the offence. Then my hon. Friend asks why is he interned? The reason is because this man, although a British subject, is of hostile origin, and has come under suspicion. We must, to intern a British subject, have a very strong reason. You must have evidence of hostile origin or association as provided by the Regulations issued under the Defence of the Realm Act. In this case a matter was brought to my notice which led me to have grave suspicion of Mr. Laszlo's activities; but the facts, to my knowledge, were not sufficient, as I have said before, and I say it again, to convict him of treason. They were sufficient to induce in my mind a suspicion that what

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 he was doing might be injurious to this country, and to justify me in the exercise of my discretion in internment, so that whether the suspicion was right or wrong this country, at all events, was safe from anything he might do." As provided by the Regulations, he had a right to have his case investigated by the Advisory Committee which reports to me. They investigated the case in the same manner as they investigate every case. They went carefully into the facts and heard evidence. No kind of preference, no kind of indulgence was shown to Mr. Laszlo. They made their report to me without the least interference on my part, and I acted upon it.

My hon. Friend asks why is the matter to be reconsidered in December? The answer to that, so far as I am concerned, is very brief. The Advisory Committee to whom I owe, and we all owe, a debt of gratitude for the work which they do, recommended that the internment should be confirmed but that, for reasons which they gave, the decision should be reconsidered after two months. I could not accept a part only of their advice, and, out of respect for them, I accepted the whole of it. I confirmed the internment and said that the matter would be reconsidered in two months. Reconsideration does not mean release. It only means, of course, that it will be my business, at the end of two months, to go into the facts once more, no doubt to get a further report upon the case relating to any new facts, and then to see if any case whatever is made for releasing in December a man who was interned in October. That is all that it means. I am sure the House will agree that I could not, in deference to the Committee, take a different course from that I have taken.

The hon. Baronet (Sir R. Cooper) seemed to think that someone is protecting Mr. Laszlo. So far as I am concerned there is not the least foundation for that. I receive many thousands of letters; but I have not received one from any person asking me to show any favour whatever to him. Indeed, those who were associated with Mr. Laszlo in earlier days were exceedingly careful not to intervene in any way. The other case referred to is that of Dr. Markel. The hon. Baronet said he is visiting enemy camps, and I interjected a negative, because though he was allowed

in earlier days to visit enemy camps his permit was withdrawn in June, 1916, and the withdrawal was mentioned to the House in the following month in answer to a question. The other suggestion was that instructions were at some time given to the police to cease to watch him. [Interruption.] It is rather difficult for me to deal with it. I will tell the House what I know of the case. I had rather say it than leave any mystery about the matter. So far as I can find from the papers, instructions were given—I believe some time last year, before I became Home Secretary—not to cease to watch Dr. Markel, but that instead of being under the supervision of the local police he should come under the supervision of the special police—Scotland Yard. In other words, so far from the watch being relaxed, it should be made more stringent and more complete.

Sir R. COOPER: Was it or was it not the fact that Scotland Yard took charge of the case, and the police in Kensington, who were about the house day and night, were instructed not to watch or report on this man?

Sir G. CAVE: If that was done it was done as a wise precaution, because everyone of experience knows that to have two people watching the same man is rather an unwise thing. One is apt to give the other away. Last Friday I received a letter which I will read to the House. The letter is dated "Home Office, 30th June, 1916":

"Dear Sir Richard Cooper,—I have made inquiry into the question of the police supervision of Dr. Markel. I find that this and some other cases have been transferred from the Divisional police to the specially skilled staff at Headquarters with a view to securing closer and more effective supervision. This probably is the explanation of the information furnished to you, but the result is the exact opposite of what your information led you to conclude."

That confirms my statement. I hope that every mysterious case of inaction or failure on the part of officials will in the same way be brought before the House.

Sir R. COOPER: Will the right hon. Gentleman say why if this man is safe and known to be safe for three years, it is so important that the duty of watching him should be taken out of the hands of the divisional police and taken up by Scotland Yard?

Sir G. CAVE: That was hardly the point of my hon. Friend. There are people who are not actually convicted of crime, but who are watched. This only shows that a special

watch upon this man was contemplated, and if he is not under lock and key it is because Scotland Yard could not discover any sufficient evidence against him. May I leave Dr. Markel there? I am sure my hon. Friend and I have the same object in view. He, like myself, only desires that every possible step should be taken to protect the country against the action of our enemies, and I hope in this case I have shown him that the case which he raised has received careful consideration, and that we have not forgotten any necessary precautions.

Mr. TREVELYAN: I wish to say a few words on the question of the imprisonment of Mr. Morel. One reason why I shall not spend much time in discussing it is because the views which I think it important to put before the House were put before them in such admirable language and in such an admirable and temperate way by the hon. Member (Commander Wedgwood). The Home Secretary made a very simple answer, to which I cannot technically object. He said that Mr. Morel had been guilty of an offence under the law, strictly speaking, under Regulations made under a law passed by the Home Office, and that he was guilty of an offence under the law which he admitted. What I wish the House fully to understand is the extremely simple technical character of the offence which Mr. Morel committed. He tried to export some of his books to M. Romain Rolland in Switzerland. These books are all perfectly legal in this country. Many of them have an enormous circulation. He has a right under the law to export these books to any Allied country, and there is no possible offence. Shortly before he committed the offence of trying to send these books to M. Rolland in Switzerland there was a new Regulation to make it illegal to send them to a neutral country. I do not know whether Mr. Morel knew it or not. Of course, however many Regulations the Government may issue, every citizen ought to know what the law is. However, he committed an offence against the Regulations, but at all events was trying to send books perfectly legal in this country, in Russia, America, France, and elsewhere, to a French citizen who happened to be living in Switzerland. That is all. For that this man is put in prison for six months. I will not say to the House that that is a political prosecution. I will only say that it looks to a large number of people who do not happen to be violently

prejudiced against Mr. Morel as if it were a political prosecution. It does not look as if it were an offence for which a man would naturally be put in prison for six months, especially a citizen who has got a record, such as was pointed out by the hon. and gallant Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme as being Mr. Morel's in the past. That is all I want to add to what has been said about this. I think that in view of that fact, and in view of the fact that however unpopular hon. Members of this House may think Mr. Morel to be, it is an unwise thing to punish very severely a man who has a very large political following among the humbler classes of this country, however much you may dislike the fact, and because the man's offence was so small, I would suggest that it would be wise of the Government to use the clemency of the Crown in this matter.

Mr. KING: As the hon. Member for Walsall, who has just left the Chamber, made an attack, which I think very unfair and unjust, on a man who could not reply; I trust that the House will allow me to say a few words as to the case of Dr. Markel. I did not know that this attack was about to be made, and I have not consulted my Friends in the matter, and therefore I am not able to say all that I should like to say about it; but I wish that the hon. Member for Walsall were here, that I might tell him what he knows already, that in the minds of a great many of us it is a very mean thing for him, a chemical manufacturer, to attack another man standing very high in the same business, and knowing, as he does, the peculiar position which Dr. Markel occupies in that profession. The second point I have to make is this: He knows perfectly well that there are men in this House who know Dr. Markel personally very well indeed. There is at least one Gentleman who frequently sits upon the Treasury Bench who is very intimately acquainted with him, and I think that it is somewhat strange that he has not informed, as I have no doubt he did not do, that Gentleman of the attack which he was going to make on Dr. Markel. The third point I wish to make is that since the War began Dr. Markel has done work of the very highest service, which is recognised by more than one Department of the State, and there are certainly several men of the very highest position in at least two Departments that I can name who know Dr. Markel personally;

[Mr. King.]

and have the very highest respect for him, who recognise the services which he has rendered to this country, both before the War, and especially during the War; and it is ungenerous to the last degree that vague and insinuating attacks should be made by the hon. Member for Walsall upon this respected citizen, who has served the country of his adoption, which he has lived in for over thirty years, as a citizen in such a way. Those who have listened, or who will peruse carefully the speech of the hon. Member for Walsall (Sir R. Cooper) will not think very much of his observations. If we take his speech to-night, as typical of what the National party have to put before us in this Assembly, and before the country at the next election, we are not going to have the seriousness of politics very largely increased; in fact, for extravagance and absurdity I think the speech of the hon. Member is the highest exposition I have ever listened to in this House. Let me recall the statements which he repeated singly, as though they were true. Spies had caused the whole of the present position in Italy. The retreat on the Italian front was due entirely to spies. Spies were more powerful than armies of millions of men. We listened to a long and serious discussion of how the German submarines were assisted by Germans walking about our docks and wharves, and choosing the ships that would be most valuable for the submarines to attack. We were seriously told that this information goes out daily to the enemy submarines. I am sure that the House will see the extravagance, absurdity, and levity of such speeches. There are other matters to which I should have liked to call the attention of the Home Secretary if I had had an opportunity of speaking before he rose, but I hope that he will bear in mind that I desire to discuss several questions on the Consolidated Fund Bill, on which I shall have an opportunity of bringing them to his notice. At this time of the evening I do not propose to follow the question which has been raised by hon. Members, but I hope that I shall have an opportunity later.

Question, "That this House doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution," put, and agreed to.

WAYS AND MEANS.—[30th October.]

Resolution reported:

"That, towards making good the Supply granted to His Majesty for the service of the year ending on the 31st day of March, 1916, the sum of £20 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund of the United Kingdom."

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution reported:

"That, towards making good the Supply granted to His Majesty for the service of the year ending on the 31st day of March, 1918, the sum of £441,501,923 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund of the United Kingdom."

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That this House doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution."

Mr. KING: Can we have an explanation why there are two Resolutions in Ways and Means? I think it is only usual to have one.

Mr. SPEAKER: The first one is for £20 from last year.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the said Resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Baldwin.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 5) BILL,—“to apply a sum out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending on the thirty-first day of March, one thousand nine hundred and eighteen,” presented accordingly; read the first time; to be read a second time to-morrow, and to be printed.

The remaining Orders were read, and postponed.

Whereupon Mr. SPEAKER, pursuant to the Order of the House, of 12th February, proposed the Question "That this House do now Adjourn."

Question put, and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Five minutes before Eleven o'clock.

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