Archivo Histórico — Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto — Argentina

pag. 1665

Volume 378
No. 47

Thursday
19th Mar., 1942

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

N° VII

Contents

QUESTIONS TO MINISTERS:
Malaya and Singapore [Col. 1648].
"Daily Mirror" Cartoon [Col. 1665].
Business of the House [Col. 1671].

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (MR. CASEY'S APPOINTMENT):
Prime Minister's Statement [Col. 1664].

HOUSEHOLD FOOD RESERVES (NEW ORDER):
Major Lloyd George's Statement [Col. 1669].

GOVERNMENT OF BURMA ACT, 1935:
Shan States Federal Fund Order:
Audit and Accounts Order:
Motions for Addresses agreed to.

SUGAR INDUSTRY (*Recommitted*) BILL:
Considered in Committee; reported, without Amendment; read the Third time, and passed.

ADJOURNMENT:
Ex-Service Men (Badge).
Mercantile Marine.
Boys (Hours of Work).
Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners.

ROYAL ASSENT TO BILL PASSED.

LONDON:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE
To be purchased in the manner indicated on the back of this wrapper

Price Sixpence net

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Thursday, 19th March, 1942.

OFFICIAL REPORT.

[Mr. SPEAKER *in the Chair.*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER.

MR. SPEAKER made the following communication to the House:

I regret to have to inform the House of the death of Sir John Train, Member for the Borough of Glasgow (Cathcart Division), and I desire, on behalf of the House, to express our sense of the loss we have sustained and our sympathy with the relatives of the honourable Member.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS.

MILITARY SERVICE.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS.

2. **Mr. Rhys Davies** asked the Minister of Labour whether he will issue instructions to all tribunals judging claims for exemption from military service by conscientious objectors, that members of such tribunals must not sit in judgment in cases where they are in any way connected as the employers of any conscientious objector appearing before them.

The Minister of Labour (Mr. Ernest Bevin): While I have no authority to issue instructions to these tribunals, I have no doubt that the members can be relied upon to exercise their discretion to withdraw from the hearing of any case in which they are personally interested.

Mr. Davies: If I send the right hon. Gentleman a case in which a member of a tribunal sat in judgment on one of the employees of the executive of which he was a member, will he look into it?

Mr. Bevin: Yes, Sir.

DISCHARGED MEN (RE-EXAMINATION).

7. **Sir John Mellor** asked the Minister of Labour why he declines to apply the provisions of Section 4 of the National Service (No. 2) Act, 1941, to any person discharged on medical grounds from one of the Forces who may, subsequently, be found fit for service in the same Force or in one of the other Forces.

Mr. Bevin: Cases in which a man discharged from the Forces on medical grounds might subsequently be found fit for service should be relatively few, and are likely to give rise to conflicts of medical opinion; for these reasons, as I explained in the House on 9th December, 1941, during the passage of the National Service Bill, I think it is better to take a clear cut line and not to call up such men again for the Forces. They will be directed where necessary into industry.

Sir J. Mellor: How can the right hon. Gentleman expect medical boards to foresee with certainty that some men may not become fit for service at a later date, and why should not such men be re-examined after a reasonable interval of time?

Mr. Bevin: In my view it would be likely to cause more heartburning, trouble and mistakes than the State would gain. If a man has been discharged for medical reasons—and he has to undergo a very strict examination before any of the Services let him go—I had better use his services in industry rather than put him through all that again.

NATIONAL WAR EFFORT.

TRANSFERRED MINERS (TRAVEL WARRANTS).

3. **Mr. Arthur Hollins** asked the Minister of Labour whether he is aware of the hardship involved by the transfer of married miners from one mining area to another in so far as the miners cannot afford to pay the necessary railway fare to visit their homes; and will he consider the issue of free railway warrants to such miners to enable them to visit their homes once every three months?

Mr. Bevin: While I could not introduce a concession of this kind for the benefit of workers in one particular industry, I have the whole matter under review and will bear my hon. Friend's suggestion in mind.

YOUNG PERSONS (HOURS OF WORK).

4. **Mr. Graham White** asked the Minister of Labour whether he has reached

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. White.]
any decision with regard to the hours of employment of young persons in the pottery industry?

Mr. Bevin: I have the matter at present under consideration.

Mr. White: Will my right hon. Friend be making a statement in the fairly near future?

Mr. Bevin: I hope so.

14. **Mr. Rhys Davies** asked the Minister of Labour how many Orders under the Factory Acts have been issued allowing young persons to be employed up to 52 hours per week; the date of issue in each case; the several industries they cover; the approximate number of young persons affected; and whether any steps are taken to record any deleterious effects on the mental and physical standards of those young persons?

Mr. Bevin: I have made two Orders, dated 23rd December and 5th February last, under which working hours up to 52, or in the former case 53, can be authorised for young persons under 16 as well as for older persons. They apply to the pottery and cotton spinning industries respectively. The Orders cannot, however, be used at any particular factory unless permission to do so has been obtained from the District Factory Inspector, and I have no figures as to the present numbers of such permissions, though I shall be receiving returns shortly. The permissions do not relate to any specified numbers of young persons. The working of the Orders is being closely watched.

Mr. Davies: Is the right hon. Gentleman keeping watch on the complaints that are made from time to time, like the one the other day from Huddersfield about young persons working such long hours that they were deteriorating mentally and physically?

Mr. Bevin: I understand that that matter comes up for Debate to-day. It has nothing to do with this Question.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that such an Order is necessary for the furtherance of the war effort? If it is found to be harmful to the health of these young people, will he take steps to withdraw it?

Mr. Bevin: As I explained in reply to a previous Question, the difficulty arises when emergencies are suddenly forced upon the Ministry. It is extremely difficult to work the differences of hours between 16 and under 16, and sooner or later in subsequent legislation it will have to be straightened out.

Dr. Edith Summerskill: Are these young persons medically examined before the factory inspector asks them to undertake these long hours?

Mr. Bevin: I would like notice of that Question.

15. **Mr. Denman** asked the Minister of Labour what requirements of the war caused him to raise the working hours of young persons under 16 years of age in certain cotton factories to 52 hours a week?

16. **Mr. Kenneth Lindsay** asked the Minister of Labour what reasons prompted him to agree to an Order extending the hours of young workers in the cotton industry?

Mr. Bevin: I was satisfied that war requirements of various kinds necessitated longer hours of work in cotton spinning mills, and representatives of both sides had agreed to increase them up to 52, on the basis that the new scheme of hours would apply irrespective of age. In view of the extent to which this industry is organised with assistants under 16, I decided that I could not exclude them from the Order permitting the longer hours for others working with them.

FACTORIES (PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT).

5. **Mr. Brooke** asked the Minister of Labour whether his Department has prepared, and has brought to the notice of employers, any leaflets or printed information showing in detail how different systems of part-time work are being operated in many factories; and how the principal difficulties which strike anyone who has had no experience of the system are in practice being successfully overcome?

Mr. Bevin: Articles on this subject, dealing in particular with methods of overcoming practical difficulties, have been printed in the "Engineering Bulletin," a monthly magazine published

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

by my Department and circulated to employers in the engineering and allied industries. I am sending my hon. Friend a copy. A special pamphlet is in preparation, which will be widely distributed.

PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES.

6. **Sir Leonard Lyle** asked the Minister of Labour whether he can give a list of private employment agencies that have been approved under the Employment of Women (Control of Engagement) Order No. 100; and whether he can indicate what proportion of existing employment agencies are likely to receive approval under that Order?

Mr. Bevin: The agencies which have so for been approved under the Order are as follow:

Thirteen University Appointments Boards or Committees.
The Industrial Welfare Society.
The Institute of Labour Management.
The Institute of Hospital Almoners.
The Society of Radiographers.
The Society of Women Housing Managers.
The Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes.

As regards the second part of the Question, I do not anticipate that this list will be greatly extended.

Sir L. Lyle: Is it not a fact that almost all the private employment agencies which have applied have been refused approval, and is there really an intention of quietly strangling all these agencies?

Mr. Bevin: I have no intention of strangling anyone. It is a mere question of administration, and I must try to get the best type of machinery I can.

Mr. Levy: In my right hon. Friend's endeavour to get the best type of machinery, why is it necessary to do away with all these agencies? Does he suggest that the Employment Exchange is the best type of machinery for the various kinds of employment?

Mr. Bevin: Considering the Exchanges are transferring to industry nearly 20,000 women a week, I think they are fairly effective.

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS (TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP).

8. **Mr. Simmonds** asked the Minister of Labour the total number of manual employees in industry in Great Britain and the number of these who were members of trade unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress on the most recent convenient date?

Mr. Bevin: The total number of workpeople insured against unemployment in Great Britain at July, 1939, the latest date in respect of which figures are available for publication, was approximately 15,548,000. In the report on the proceedings at the annual Trades Union Congress held in September, 1941, the total membership of the affiliated trade unions was shown as approximately 5,079,000 at the end of December, 1940. I am not in possession of information showing how many manual and non-manual workers, respectively, were included in these totals.

Mr. Simmonds: In view of the fact that these figures show that probably there are more non-trade unionists than trade unionists in industry, would my right hon. Friend, in his various suggestions and proposals for the collaboration on an advisory basis of employees and management, bear in mind the fact that many trade unionists are well organised and elected by secret ballot in their own offices, and do his best to encourage these councils?

Mr. Bevin: I have made it clear that I have left the setting-up of these bodies to the industries concerned, and I have laid down no regulations of any kind.

Mr. James Griffiths: Has my right hon. Friend any information of the number of manual employees who benefit by the wage agreements and other agreements made by the trade unions?

FACTORY HEATING, WEST RIDING.

10. **Mr. Leach** asked the Minister of Labour whether he is aware that woolcombing and topmaking establishments in the West Riding, and particularly Bradford, possess insufficient warming facilities, and do not comply with the provisions of Section 3 (1) of the Factory Act, 1937; and will he instruct his inspectors to take steps to secure a remedy in view of the fact that production is being hampered by the prevailing conditions?

Mr. Bevin: I am not aware of any general complaint of this kind. If my hon. Friend has evidence that the law is

Archivo Histórico — Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

[Mr. Bevin.]
being infringed at any named factory or factories, I would be obliged if he would send me particulars or arrange for them to be sent to the local Factory Inspector.

Mr. Leach: I will do that.

ARMED FORCES AND CIVILIANS (PENSIONS AND GRANTS).

17. **Captain Gammans** asked the Minister of Pensions what has been the approximate saving to the Exchequer, to date, by the payment of lower rates of compensation for war injuries to adult women as compared with men?

The Minister of Pensions (Sir Walter Womersley): The records kept by my Department do not enable me to furnish the information desired by my hon. and gallant Friend, and I should not feel justified in undertaking the considerable research necessary to give even an approximate estimate.

20. **Sir Smedley Crooke** asked the Minister of Pensions whether he can now state his intentions as to setting up independent pension appeal tribunals on a statutory basis?

Sir W. Womersley: I have previously expressed my sympathy with the desire for statutory independent tribunals and my regret that difficulties of personnel and transport prevent their establishment during the war. I am, however, authorised to say that it is the intention of the Government to set them up as soon as practicable after the war.

Mr. Rhys Davies: When they are set up can all cases that have emerged since the commencement of the war be brought before these tribunals?

Sir W. Womersley: Yes, Sir.

Major Milner: May we take it that the right hon. Gentleman's statement does not mean that he has entirely excluded further consideration of this matter during the war, which may yet last a long time?

Sir W. Womersley: No, Sir, but I thought it was desirable that I should get a Government decision on this matter placed on record.

INDIA.

Retired Service Men (Instructorships).

21. **Major Milner** asked the Secretary of State for India whether he is aware that there are numbers of retired warrant and non-commissioned officers in this country, some with Indian experience, who would be glad to be of service as instructors in India; and whether any steps have been or are being taken to make use of them in that capacity?

The Secretary of State for India (Mr. Amery): My Department considers, in consultation with the Government of India, applications from any retired non-commissioned officer or warrant officer who volunteers for service in India. But, in general, India's demands for British Army personnel are made direct upon the War Office and it is for that Department to allocate, in accordance with the demands received from various quarters, those retired men who, though not liable for service under the National Service Act, may still be considered fit for further military employment in India or elsewhere.

Major Milner: Having regard to the serious state of affairs in this connection and the great neglect of which, if the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me saying so, he and his Department have been guilty, is he not splitting hairs in dividing responsibility between his Department and the War Office? If these men are required, are they not either appealed for or compelled to report, which many of them would be very happy to do?

Mr. Amery: I must entirely repudiate the charge of neglect. If the hon. and gallant Member will give me any instances of individuals who have applied and whose applications have not been considered, I shall be very glad.

Major Milner: When there is a war on, surely it is not necessary to wait for men to apply. If their services are required, should not the right hon. Gentleman either appeal for them or call them up?

Mr. Amery: If the Government of India require men, they apply to the War Office, and the War Office does its best.

Major Milner: Is it not obvious that it has not done so in this instance?

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

MILITARY ROAD CONSTRUCTION.

22. **Major Lyons** asked the Secretary of State for India on what dates were the construction of the new Manipur-Lashio and Assam-Chunking roads, respectively, commenced and when each is expected to be ready for military use; what department, military or civil, is responsible for the work; whether he has satisfied himself that every form of modern mechanical road-making machinery is being employed to hasten on this work; and why there has been delay in its execution?

Mr. Amery: The hon. and gallant Member will recognise that it is not in the public interest to disclose details of the progress of the construction of roads in Assam and Burma for military use. I can, however, assure him that the military authorities, assisted by engineers of civil departments, are carrying out this task with the greatest energy and are making use of all available resources including mechanical road-making machinery. I cannot agree that there has been any delay in execution of this work.

Major Lyons: Has not my right hon. Friend given permission for publication of long newspaper articles stating in detail that permission had been given to start these roads? If he has given permission for those articles to be published, he must have satisfied himself that their publication was in the public interest.

Mr. Amery: It was not for me to give permission.

Major Lyons: Has my right hon. Friend taken steps to ascertain who did give permission for the publication of these articles, to which his personal attention has been directed; and if it is in the public interest for these details to be published in the Press, why cannot the matter be discussed in this House before the responsible Minister who can answer about it?

Mr. Amery: I am not the responsible Minister in this case.

OFFICIAL ENTERTAINMENTS AND CEREMONIES.

23. **Major Lyons** asked the Secretary of State for India whether he will express to the Viceroy and Government in India, in the interests of an intensification of the war effort, the view of His Majesty's Government that all official and other unnecessary entertainments, ceremonies and incidental expenditure should cease?

Mr. Amery: The Government of India are fully alive to the desirability in present circumstances of restricting expenditure that does not contribute to the war effort and have issued instructions enjoining strict economy in all such expenditure.

Major Lyons: Will the right hon. Gentleman make inquiries to ascertain whether there has been, and if so why, a whole stream of unnecessary expenses in the last 12 months, expenses that might well have been avoided if there had been the slightest appreciation of what the position must inevitably be by now, and will he take steps to ensure that some consideration is given to the matter by those who are responsible?

Major Milner: Is it not a fact that the Viceroy himself has incurred considerable expenditure in that direction by having his own car brought from Delhi, a distance of many hundreds of miles, for one appearance and ought he not to set a better example?

Mr. Amery: I will inquire.

Major Milner: Will the right hon. Gentleman let me know whether that is a fact or not?

ARREST (REPRESENTATIONS).

24. **Mr. Rhys Davies** asked the Secretary of State for India what representations have been made by the Calicut Labour Council concerning K. R. P. Gopalans when this person was arrested and on what charge, and whether he is now undergoing sentence?

Mr. Amery: I have no knowledge of any such representations or of the person referred to, but if the honourable Member will let me have further particulars, I will make inquiries.

Mr. Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman take steps to win the support of these people in India rather than prosecute them?

Mr. Amery: I have no knowledge of the particular case to which the hon. Member refers.

POLITICAL PRISONERS.

25. **Mr. Sorensen** asked the Secretary of State for India whether any action is to

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Sorensen.]

be taken respecting the plea by Mr. Joshi, the trade union leader and member of the Legislative Assembly, for the release of political prisoners in India; and whether he can give any information respecting the number of students in India imprisoned or detained on political charges?

26. **Mr. Sloan** asked the Secretary of State for India what representations he has received for the release of political prisoners in India; and what steps, if any, does he intend to take?

27. **Mr. Gallacher** asked the Secretary of State for India whether he will recommend to the Viceroy the immediate liberation of all political prisoners as a gesture that will facilitate the task of the Lord Privy Seal?

29. **Mr. Silverman** asked the Secretary of State for India how many Indian trade unionists are now imprisoned or detained in India for political reasons; and how many university students?

30. **Mr. Cove** asked the Secretary of State for India whether he proposes to take any action regarding the representations made to him by Mr. Joshi, secretary of the Indian Trades Union Congress, respecting the release of all political prisoners?

31. **Mr. S. O. Davies** asked the Secretary of State for India what answer he has given to the representations made to him by Mr. Joshi, on behalf of the Indian Trade Union Congress, urging on His Majesty's Government that a valuable contribution to the immediate situation would be the release of the remaining Indian political prisoners?

32. **Mr. Pritt** asked the Secretary of State for India whether his attention has been called to the cable recently sent by Mr. Joshi, member of the Indian Legislative Assembly and secretary of the Indian Trade Union Congress, appealing for the release of political prisoners in India, including Communists and labour leaders, who have declared in favour of unconditional support for the war on the basis of the alliance between Britain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and whether he will direct their immediate release in order to create a more favourable atmosphere for the considerations of the proposals carried by the Lord Privy Seal?

Mr. Amery: I do not appear to have received any recent appeal from Mr. Joshi for the release of political prisoners. In any case I doubt whether the situation in India would be improved by the release of persons who have attempted by violent methods to oppose the war effort or to compass the overthrow of the existing basis of society. I am unable to say how many trade unionists or students are included among the persons at present imprisoned or detained in India in consequence of action of that sort.

Mr. Sorensen: Did not the right hon. Gentleman receive a copy of the cablegram which I received from Mr. Joshi, and will he not agree that Mr. Joshi is a person of great industrial eminence in India and that his appeal should receive most sympathetic consideration?

Major Milner: Has not this question of the release of prisoners been considered in connection with the visit to India of the Lord Privy Seal?

Mr. Gallacher: Is it not the case that all these people are in prison for fighting for the freedom of India, and would it not facilitate the task of the Lord Privy Seal if these fighters for Indian freedom were liberated?

Mr. Amery: No, Sir, no one is imprisoned in India for fighting for the freedom of India. It is only if they urge violent methods in pursuit of their policy that they incur that danger.

Mr. Gallacher: Is the Minister now saying that if they fight for freedom in India, they must fight in the way he wants them to or they will go to gaol?

MOSLEMS.

28. **Mr. Silverman** asked the Secretary of State for India how many Indian Moslems are represented by the Moslem League?

Mr. Amery: If the Question refers to actual membership of the Moslem League, I understand that the League does not publish this information.

BURMA (POLITICAL PARTIES).

34. **Mr. Sorensen** asked the Secretary of State for Burma what political parties in Burma have been, or are, suspended or suppressed by law; how many political

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

parties are represented in the legislature and their respective strength; and whether the present Coalition Government of Sir Paw Tun differs materially in its political composition from the Government of U Saw?

Mr. Amery: The Thakin Party was proscribed by the Burmese Home Minister last January on account of fifth-column activities. The chief other parties are the Myochit Party, the United Party, the Sin-ye-tha Party and the Nationalist Party, but I cannot give their respective strength in the House of Representatives as the lines of division are very fluid. The present Coalition Ministry is mostly composed of the Ministers who served under U Saw.

Mr. Sorensen: Ought not the right hon. Gentleman to secure information regarding the composition of the various parties in the Burmese Legislature, and does he not think it significant that much the same Ministers who served under U Saw are also serving under the present Premier?

Mr. Amery: No, Sir, there is no reason to attribute the delinquencies of U Saw to his colleagues.

Sir Percy Harris: Are there among the members of these various parties persons who joined our enemies, the Japanese, when they were in Burma, and have any of them fought against us?

Mr. Amery: No, Sir. Except for the Thakin Party to which I have referred, there is no evidence of fifth-column activity.

CIVIL DEFENCE.

Regional Commissioners (Inspections).

35. **Sir Percy Hurd** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is the practice of Regional Commissioners to make periodical visits to the Civil Defence units under their care and test the efficacy of the local arrangements to meet invasion or whether that duty will be enforced upon them?

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Herbert Morrison): The answer to the first part of the Question is in the affirmative, and the second part does not therefore arise.

Sir P. Hurd: Will the right hon. Gentleman take the opportunity of paying surprise visits to two or three typical areas, my own constituency, for instance, to see for himself what is happening and what is not happening?

Mr. Morrison: I doubt whether I should see all that is happening or all that is not happening, even if I went there on surprise visits.

Works Fire Brigades (Compensation for Injuries).

36. **Mr. Salt** asked the Home Secretary whether men who volunteer in works fire brigades and undertake works ambulance duties are covered against accident while on duty, similarly to other Civil Defence units?

Mr. H. Morrison: I have received representations on this matter which are having consideration. I regret that I am not yet in a position to make a statement.

Firewatching.

39. **Sir Robert Young** asked the Home Secretary whether he is aware that many men between the ages of 55 and 60 are working 58 hours or more a week plus meals and travelling times, amounting in some cases to 14 hours away from home; that these men are called upon to do fire-watching duties, and as a result of 48 hours fire-watching time a month in addition to such daily work are being physically impaired for production work; and whether there is any method whereby authenticated cases can be exempted from fire-watching?

Mr. H. Morrison: The Business Premises Order gives power to appropriate authorities to direct the exemption from fire-prevention duties in whole or in part, of persons engaged on vital work for exceptionally long hours; and I have every reason to believe that this power is exercised with great care by the appropriate authorities who are naturally anxious that production should not suffer through over-fatigue caused by the performance of fire-prevention duties outside working hours.

Sir R. Young: Does that mean that older men must apply to some doctor for a certificate that they are not able to do this work; and does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that it is not easy to get a certificate of that character?

Archivo Histórico Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

Mr. Morrison: It all depends upon the nature of the case. If it was a medical case, medical evidence would be necessary. If it is purely a matter of age, other and non-medical considerations probably arise. No doubt the House will understand that my problem is not a superabundance of fire watchers from which I have to eliminate a superfluity, but to get enough of them. Nevertheless, I want to be reasonable, in accordance with the request of my hon. Friend.

CIVIL DEFENCE SERVICES (PETROL).

41. **Mr. Brooke** asked the Home Secretary what steps he is taking, in line with the abolition of the basic petrol ration for retailers and private motorists, to eliminate unnecessary use of petrol by the Civil Defence forces, including the National Fire Service?

Mr. H. Morrison: The need for the utmost economy in the use of petrol has been impressed upon all Fire Force commanders and a system of control designed to prevent unauthorised use of petrol and oil has been instituted throughout the National Fire Service. In addition I have asked Regional Commissioners to give this matter their personal attention. The vehicles of the other Civil Defence Services remain under local authority control and steps are being taken by my Department in co-operation with the Petroleum Department to achieve the strictest economy in the use of petrol by the Civil Defence Services.

Sir Patrick Hannon: What action is the right hon. Gentleman taking in the case of those footballers who travelled from Bolton to Dumfries recently in a Fire Service vehicle?

Mr. Morrison: This step was taken, I am sorry to say, without the knowledge or consent of myself or of the Regional Commissioner. I have seen the Deputy Regional Commissioner concerned with the Fire Service and the Chief Regional Fire Officer, and have told them how strongly I disapprove of the use of Fire Service transport and petrol for such journeys. The Deputy Regional Commissioner has submitted his resignation. The Chief Regional Fire Officer has been severely admonished. I have also ordered that the use of National Fire Service transport for sports purposes shall stop, pending the issue of further instructions.

Major Lyons: Will the right hon. Gentleman consider to what extent a number of people in his Regional offices up and down the country are using big motor vehicles for one passenger only, when such journeys might very well be done by much smaller cars?

Mr. Morrison: These matters are certainly kept under observation, but long and difficult journeys often have to be undertaken, and I hope the House will not press me to take a course by which the efficiency of the Services might be impaired. I can assure the House that I will take all practicable steps.

Mr. Thorne: Does not the right hon. Gentleman think that petrol could be saved if rehearsals in the Fire Service were cut down?

Mr. Morrison: No, Sir, I do not. It is very important that the Fire Service exercises should be conducted in order that a much higher state of efficiency should be reached.

Sir Herbert Williams: Will the restrictions apply also to police trips in the West End?

Mr. Morrison: I saw a story about that, and I have sent a suitable minute asking for the facts.

61. **Major Kimball** asked the Home Secretary whether he will take the necessary action to ensure greater economy in the use of petrol by the National Fire Service, and in particular to discontinue the long distance practice runs by complete units with full equipment and substitute, if such practice runs are necessary to train drivers, a token force of one or two vehicles carrying all spare drivers as passengers?

Mr. H. Morrison: As regards the first part of the Question, I would refer my hon. and gallant Friend to the Reply I have just given to the hon. Member for West Lewisham (Mr. Brooke). As regards reinforcement exercised, the principle of token detachments is fully recognised and often acted upon in the National Fire Service, but many other considerations besides the training of drivers are involved. When the fire brigades controlled by the local authorities were taken over by the National Fire Service, many of them fell short of the required standard of efficiency, and, until the new Service

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

has been brought up to the necessary standard, I consider that occasional full scale exercises are entirely justified and necessary in the national interest.

JAPANESE NATIONALS (INTERNMENT).

63. **Mr. Cocks** asked the Home Secretary what is the policy of His Majesty's Government regarding interning Japanese subjects in this country?

Mr. H. Morrison: Out of a total of some 500 Japanese in this country, about 100 have been interned in the interests of national security. The policy has been to effect internment on a selective basis as distinct from general internment but I shall not, of course, hesitate to order the internment of Japanese nationals if I am satisfied that they cannot be allowed to be at large without danger to the national interests.

Mr. Cocks: In view of the number of British prisoners in Japanese hands, is it not desirable to take as many of these poisonous people under our control as possible?

Mr. Morrison: I wish always to please the House, but it must be remembered that when there was general internment previously at the demand of the House, there was very quickly a reaction against it. The point my hon. Friend raises is a factor for consideration which would concern another Department as well as my own. I do not exclude it as a possibility, but I would like to be sure of the facts before I do so.

Mr. Cocks: Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that unless they are interned, they may be subject to private vengeance?

Lieut.-Colonel. Sir Thomas Moore: Is there not a certain feeling of resentment against what is felt to be a form of old world courtesy towards these people?

Captain Duncan: Will the right hon. Gentleman consider the number of police and the cost to the country in exercising Japanese, in view of the treatment of British nationals in Hong Kong and elsewhere? Will he consider a reduction in the exercise time and the number of police used to exercise these Japanese?

Mr. Morrison: I think that the hon. and gallant Member is referring to diplomatic personnel. There are diplomatic privileges all round, and so long as that is so, it is reasonable that the diplomatic personnel should exercise. When they do exercise, police are with them.

Sir W. Davison: Will the right hon. Gentleman consider particulars which I sent him about these Japanese exercising in Kensington Gardens, which my constituents strongly object to seeing them do after the atrocities in Hong Kong?

Mr. Morrison: Yes, I will certainly do that.

JAPANESE CLUB AND JAPAN SOCIETY.

64. **Mr. Cocks** asked the Home Secretary whether he is taking steps to close down the premises of the Japanese Club and the Japanese Society in Cavendish Square?

Mr. H. Morrison: I am informed that both the Japanese Club and the Japan Society have already been wound up.

POLICE DUTIES.

37. **Commander Locker-Lampson** asked the Home Secretary whether elderly policemen or women will be substituted for young officers in such cases as motor-car offences and disorderly conduct, where the presence of two or more police-officers is required before action can be taken?

Mr. H. Morrison: It would not be possible to lay down any hard and fast rule such as my hon. and gallant Friend suggests, but he may rest assured that chief officers of police are fully alive to the desirability of using their younger officers to the best possible advantage.

Commander Locker-Lampson: Could not the right hon. Gentleman give these police a rest from the roads and use them for fighting the black-market racketeers?

Mr. Morrison: If the hon. and gallant Gentleman is asking for a relaxation of administration of the law relating to motorists, I think that is an improper suggestion.

Commander Locker-Lampson: Why should motorists who commit breaches of the law be treated as criminals?

38. **Commander Locker-Lampson** asked the Home Secretary how many prostitutes have been arrested in the Metropolis in

Archivo Histórico — Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, Argentina

[Commander Locker-Lampson.]
each of the last 10 years, and at what estimated cost to the country; what is the average age of the police employed; whether such arrests will, in future, be made by policewomen; and how many police are employed for such duties?

Mr. H. Morrison: Since 1936, separate statistics have not been kept of the number of arrests for prostitution in the Metropolitan Police District, and the information asked for could not be obtained without an undue expenditure of labour. It is not possible to estimate the cost involved nor the average age of the police officers who effected the arrests. No police officers are specially employed for this purpose and it would not be practicable to confine this duty to women police since this is one of many types of offence which it may be the duty of any officer to deal with in the course of patrolling his beat.

FUN FAIRS AND AMUSEMENT ARCADES.

43. **Mr. Crowder** asked the Home Secretary what is the present number of fun fairs and amusement arcades remaining in the London area; how many are in operation; and whether, in view of the fact that most of them offend against the Betting Act, 1853, and the Gaming Act, 1845, he will arrange for more drastic police action in closing down the remainder which offend against the law?

Mr. H. Morrison: The Commissioner of Police informs me that the number active in January, 1939, was 291 in the Metropolitan Police District. I have no recent official figures, but I understand that there are now 69 active and 49 closed in the County of London Action is taken by the police in respect of breaches of the law when the element of betting or gambling is more than trivial.

Mr. Crowder: Why have not the police already seized these machines, which I understand are classed as illegal gaming machines?

Mr. Morrison: It is a question of fact in each case. It should not be assumed that the police have a universal power to seize machines, but I am advised that the police enforce the law within the limits of the law.

Mr. Lindsay: Is not my right hon. Friend to see a deputation from magistrates on this subject?

Mr. Morrison: I did not know that I was.

Mr. Goldie: Is not the Minister aware that there is no power to confiscate such machines under the Betting Act, 1853, as distinct from the Gaming Act of 1845? Will he take power to ensure that such machines are confiscated?

Mr. Morrison: I have not said that. I said that the matter had to be judged legally, in accordance with the facts of each case. I will, of course, consider any representations which are made to me, but I am bound to say that the numbers I have given do not convince me that they represent a dramatic evil which is threatening the nation's ruin. Everybody, including myself, must keep a sense of proportion about this tendency to stop everything with which somebody does not agree.

Sir Percy Harris: Has the right hon. Gentleman seen the statement made by the chairman of a juvenile court in the East End of London that an enormous amount of juvenile crime, especially among school children, is caused by frequenting these places?

Mr. Morrison: Mr. Henriques has been good enough to send me his letter, and I will take account of it, but I am not convinced that a general increase in juvenile crime is caused by these machines. There may be some exaggeration. What I am saying is that we should preserve a sense of proportion and some degree of ordinary human tolerance about these amusements.

SINGAPORE AND MALAYA.

47. **Sir H. Williams** asked the Prime Minister whether a full Report has now been received from Major-General Gordon-Bennett as to the events which preceded the capitulation of Singapore?

50. **Mr. Stokes** asked the Prime Minister why no report on the proceedings antecedent to the loss of Malaya and Singapore had been called for from Major-General Gordon-Bennett by His Majesty's Government prior to 13th March?

Archivo Histórico — Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee): On 27th February telegrams were sent to Java and to Australia saying that we would appreciate a report from Major-General Gordon-Bennett on the siege and fall of Singapore, with particular reference to certain specific points which were set out in our message. It was suggested that a summary of the report should be sent by cable and full details by air mail. A short cable report sent in answer by Major-General Gordon-Bennett was received on 4th March, but did not materially add to our previous knowledge. A more detailed report was asked for on 12th March. This is now being prepared.

Sir H. Williams: Do I understand that although over a month has elapsed since this terrible episode the Government have less information than can be published in a trade paper, "The Autocar," on 13th March, and ought not His Majesty's Government to take more vigorous steps to find out about these disastrous occurrences?

Mr. Attlee: I am afraid I am not aware of what has appeared in "The Autocar," but we are doing all we can to find out the information.

Mr. Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that only yesterday General Gordon-Bennett anounced for the first time that he has been asked to make a full report, and that a week ago, when the Lord Privy Seal said he had been asked, he denied it next day?

Mr. Attlee: I cannot be responsible for what General Gordon-Bennett said. I have set out the facts.

Commander Sir Archibald Southby: Have the Government considered the advisability of setting up a Royal Commission to inquire into this matter, in the same way as a special Commission was set up to inquire into the Gallipoli campaign in the last war? Is there any reason why the same procedure should not be followed?

Mr. Attlee: Obviously, it is not much good setting up a Commission of Inquiry until you have found out all the information available, and, as has been pointed out on more than one occasion, up to now we have not got that information. The position was very different in the case of the Gallipoli campaign.

Commander Locker-Lampson: Why not go into Norway also, and Dunkirk?

48. **Major Lyons** asked the Prime Minister whether he will give the names of each of the general officers commanding-in-chief at Singapore during the period of three months preceding the termination of hostilities there?

Mr. Attlee: The General Officer Commanding, Malaya, during the three months preceding the termination of hostilities was Acting-Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.

Major Lyons: Am I to understand that there was only one G.O.C. for the whole time until General Percival took command, and further may I ask my right hon. Friend by whom the final decision was made?

Mr. Attlee: I do not quite know what decision my hon. and gallant Friend is referring to.

Hon. Members: To surrender.

Mr. Attlee: It was a decision by the military authorities on the spot. The hon. and gallant Member asked me if the officer in command of the troops was also Commander-in-Chief in the Far East.

Major Lyons: Do I take it that there was only one G.O.C. for the whole of the three months; and, regarding the decision of General Percival in this connection, was the decision to capitulate given by him?

Mr. Attlee: I have answered the hon. and gallant Member on that point.

Major Lyons: May I ask for a straight answer from the right hon. Gentleman to this: who gave the decision to capitulate?

Mr. Attlee: I have given the answer to the hon. and gallant Member, and I am accustomed to giving straight answers in this House. The answer is that the order to capitulate was given on the spot by the general in command of the troops. The Commander-in-Chief in the Far East up to 27th December, 1941, was Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, from then to 15th January, 1942, Sir Henry Pownall, and from 15th January, 1942, Sir Archibald Wavell, until he was appointed to India.

Sir P. Harris: When he has the information available, will the right hon.

Archivo Histórico · Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

[Sir P. Harris.]
Gentleman undertake to make a full statement or, alternatively, to publish a White Paper, when all the facts and figures are at his disposal?

Sir William Davison: Who was the general who actually signed the terms of capitulation?

Mr. Attlee: For the third time, it was General Percival. We will consider what can be done when we have the information; there is no desire whatever to withhold information from the House.

Mr. Garro Jones: When my right hon. Friend says Commander-in-Chief in the Far East, does he mean that the Commander-in-Chief had command over the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, or only over the Army and the Air Force?

Mr. Attlee: The Commander-in-Chief had command over all three Services. My hon. Friend will remember that finally Sir Archibald Wavell was appointed as Commander of the whole area; Sir Robert Brooke-Popham equally was in command of all the Services.

MINISTER OF STATE (CAIRO).

49. **Mr. Stokes** asked the Prime Minister when he proposes to appoint a successor to the Minister of State in Cairo?

Mr. Attlee: An announcement will be made by the Prime Minister at the end of Questions.

RADIOLOCATION SERVICE.

53. **Mr. Garro Jones** asked the Prime Minister whether he is aware that each of the three Fighting Services operates a separate radio-location service; that information obtained by each one is often conveyed to the others late and incomplete if at all; and whether he can give an assurance that prompt remedial action will be taken?

Mr. Attlee: It is not in the public interest to give information in public on the subject to which my hon. Friend refers, but if he has any information which he would like to convey to me privately, I will see that it receives full consideration.

AGRICULTURE.

Rabbits (Extermination).

55. **Mr. Collingdridge** asked the Minister of Agriculture whether he is aware that certain war agricultural committees are giving instructions for rabbits on certain land to be poisoned; and whether other means can be found to exterminate these rabbits in such a way that they can still be of food value?

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. R. S. Hudson): Yes, Sir. The use of cyanide gas is strongly advocated as a means of exterminating rabbits which would otherwise be left as breeding stock after the employment of the normal methods of trapping or snaring and for this purpose farmers are enabled to obtain gassing power at half the normal price. Having regard to the damage caused by rabbits to food production, I am quite satisfied that the need for their destruction overrides any consideration of their food value.

Mr. Collindridge: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the trappers are in the districts concerned and that the consumers are in the industrial areas, and cannot we have the rabbits for food instead of poisoning them?

Mr. Hudson: We only poison them when we cannot trap them. We always trap a certain number, and if the hon. Member can find a means of getting the gassed rabbit out of its hole, he will be able to eat it, because it is not poisoned.

Mr. Collindridge: Would the right hon. Gentleman be prepared to receive information that trappers can do that job of work?

Animal Feeding-Stuffs (Sawdust).

56. **Major Sir Jocelyn Lucas** asked the Minister of Agriculture whether he will issue a statement on the nutritive value of sawdust; and the extent to which his Department considers it possible to be used in feeding-stuffs?

Mr. Hudson: Untreated sawdust is almost valueless as a food for livestock. Chemical treatment of sawdust has been undertaken abroad to render it suitable as a feeding stuff, but it is doubtful whether the process is economic, and further investigation would be required. The process could not be carried out on the farm.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

CINEMAS, BRIDGEND (SUNDAY OPENING).

57. **Mr. E. J. Williams** asked the Home Secretary whether he has considered the circumstances in connection with the opening of cinemas on Sundays at Bridgend; and whether he is satisfied that no abuse of the statutory procedure took place in this case?

Mr. H. Morrison: Before I made this Order, I was informed by the Bridgend Urban District Council that they had approached the local military authorities about the desirability of Sunday opening and had told the Area Commander that the council could not move in the matter unless he gave a certificate that, having regard to the large number of members of His Majesty's Forces quartered in the area, it was in his view, expedient that cinemas should open on Sunday. There is nothing in the Regulation to debar a local authority from informing the military authorities of their views as to the desirability of Sunday cinemas and it is to the credit of a local authority that they should interest themselves in the welfare of troops stationed in their area. The Area Commander gave his certificate, and as I was satisfied that the Bridgend Council had complied with the statutory requirements in submitting the Order, it was my duty to lay it before Parliament. It was approved without discussion by this House on Thursday last.

Mr. Rhys Davies: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether it is not an extraordinary procedure for the local authority to take, to request the military authority to request the local authority to ask for this Order?

Mr. Morrison: No, Sir, not in the least. If the local authority thinks in the interests of the troops and of the community that the opening of cinemas on Sundays should be considered, it is perfectly proper and legitimate that it should suggest to the military authorities that they should put in a request, because without the request of the military authorities the local authority cannot possibly consider the matter.

GAMING HOUSE PROSECUTION.

58. **Mr. Thorne** asked the Home Secretary whether he can give any information in connection with the charge made against Celeste Quattromini and others at Bow Street Police Court on 13th March for keeping a gaming house in Great Newport Street, West; how many deserters were found in this club; how many recognised criminals; how the club was guarded; what kind of food was found on the premises; whether he is aware that the police stated that a young boy of 14 years of age was serving behind the bar at one o'clock in the morning; and what action he intends taking against the manager of the club?

Mr. H. Morrison: Of the 29 persons found on these premises two were charged as deserters and one, who was wanted for shop-breaking, has been charged with that offence. Another 18 were known to have criminal records. The door to the premises was bolted and chained, and applicants for entry were scrutinised by a watchman. In the refreshment bar there was meat, fish, sausages and cheese. The boy of 14 who was serving behind this bar was the son of one of the frequenters. He was brought before a juvenile court as a young person in need of care and control, and placed in the care of the probation officer. The owner of the premises and the man who admitted being the croupier were charged under the Gaming Act, and each sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment. They have given notice of appeal against these sentences.

Mr. Thorne: May we take it for granted that when the case is over my right hon. Friend will do his level best to see that this house is not again opened as a gaming house?

Mr. Morrison: I have no doubt Scotland Yard will keep this house in mind.

Mr. J. Griffiths: How is it possible for a business of this sort to get this kind of supplies?

Mr. Morrison: I would not know that; it is presumably a matter for the Ministry of Food. I do not say "I do not know" in any aggressive sense. Naturally I should not know that.

FOOD PROSECUTION.

59. **Sir J. Lucas** asked the Home Secretary what further action he proposes to

Archivo Histórico — Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

[Sir J. Lucas.]
take in the case of David Pfifferling, a German, who was recently fined £70 for offences against the food regulations?

Mr. H. Morrison: This man has been interned.

EDUCATION.

Children (Release for National Work).

66. **Mr. Simmonds** asked the President of the Board of Education whether he will agree, during the period of hostilities, to release scholars from compulsory school atendance immediately after the birthday upon which they attain school-leaving age if they desire to make their services forthwith available for the war effort?

The President of the Board of Education (Mr. Butler): I do not propose, as at present advised, to seek power to amend the law in the manner suggested in my hon. Friend's Question.

Mr. Simmonds: Has the right hon. Gentleman discussed this with the Minister of Labour, because it is really undesirable to have these children, who are waiting to go into industry, unsettled in their studies when they could start doing national work?

Mr. John Dugdale: Would the right hon. Gentleman make it clear that we intend to win this war without child labour?

Mr. Butler: As I have indicated, there is no intention of altering the law. The change suggested would not be in the best interests of education.

Evacuated Children (Return).

69. **Mr. Lindsay** asked the President of the Board of Education how many children have recently returned from reception areas to London; what is the attitude of his Department to this movement; and what steps he is taking to assist local education authorities in their difficult task?

Mr. Butler: In the week ending 27th December, 1941, the estimated number of school children in the area of the London County Council was 157,142. In the week ending 7th March, 1942, the number was 180,599, an increase of 23,457. It is the considered view of the Government that evacuated children should remain in the receiving area, and parents have been repeatedly urged not to bring them home to the vulnerable areas. As regards the last part of the Question, the Board are using all practicable means to assist local education authorities to provide suitable educational facilities for those children who have returned.

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE (ELDERLY WORKERS).

70. **Mr. Tinker** asked the Minister of Health whether he is aware that, where men and women over the age of 65 years and 60 years, respectively, have entered industry through war emergencies who were never insured, the employer is called upon to pay his part of contributions but the workers cannot claim medical benefit or treatment because they have not previous insurance; and will he examine the position so that they can be brought in line with other workers of similar age and be allowed medical benefit treatment?

The Minister of Health (Mr. Ernest Brown): As regards the object of the provision requiring an employer to pay his share of the normal health and pensions contribution in respect of men who have reached age 65 and women who have reached 60, I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Frome (Mrs. Tate) on 29th January. The great majority of these elderly workers were already insured on reaching the ages in question and they remain entitled to medical benefit by virtue of contributions at the ordinary rates paid both by and in respect of them up to those ages. As regards the minority of such elderly workers to whom my hon. Friend refers, and who have had no such ordinary contributions paid, I am afraid that it would not be practicable to provide them with medical benefit within the framework of the existing scheme.

Mr. Tinker: Could not something be done to give them that opportunity of getting medical benefit when they enter industry to help the war effort?

Mr. Brown: As the House knows, the arrangements whereby there is built up a scheme for the provision of medical benefit for these elderly workers are complicated. It is not easy to fit the class of

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

person to whom my hon. Friend refers into the existing scheme.

Mr. Tinker: Will the Minister examine this again and see what can be done?

Mr. Brown: I will certainly look at it.

BUILDING PLANS.

71. **Mr. Simmonds** asked the Minister of Health whether he is aware that local authorities are receiving for approval plans of new buildings, notwithstanding that construction is not permitted during the war; that such approvals would normally be valid for the next three years and that these plans are being lodged in order to defeat such decisions as Parliament may make with regard to future planning; and what steps he has taken to safeguard the public interest?

Mr. E. Brown: I am aware that applications are sometimes made for permission for development for which the applicant would not be able to obtain a building licence, but I have no evidence that this practice is widespread. The present obligations of local authorities as regards interim development are under review in connection with proposed legislation from the point of view of preventing prejudice to future planning.

Mr. Simmonds: Is the Minister aware that in certain areas this practice has been indulged in? Could he say whether, in these circumstances, the local authorities could decline to pass a plan if they saw any possibility of the construction being erected?

Mr. Brown: There is another side to that. The fact that a developer may put his plans before the local authority now, although he knows that he cannot get a building licence at present, does not necessarily mean that he is trying to overcome possible planning restrictions. It may be due to a desire to clear away formalities so that he may commence building as soon as circumstances permit.

WOMAN-POWER (ADVISORY COMMITTEE).

73. **Miss Ward** asked the Minister of Health whether he has considered the appointment of any further advisory committee in connection with the work of his Department arising out of the representations made by the Woman-power Committee?

Mr. E. Brown: Yes, Sir. On various aspects of the work of my Department, committees are already in existence which include women members. On the special question of the care of young children I established an informal circle of women interested in this problem. In view of the special importance of problems affecting the care of young children in war-time and the new questions which arise thereon in relation to Government policy, I have decided to extend these arrangements and put them on a more formal footing. I have decided therefore to establish a committee to advise me on questions affecting the welfare of young children. I am consulting the appropriate organisations and hope to make an announcement as to the constitution of the committee at an early date.

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

74. **Mr. Viant** asked the Minister of Health the names of the voluntary organisations referred to in the Report of the Assistance Board, Command 6338, issued in February 1942, to which the old age pensioners are referred when in need?

Mr. E. Brown: The reference covers any suitable organisations that may be in operation in the district. Before a pensioner who is in need of friendly interest is put in touch with a voluntary organisation he is asked whether he wishes this to be done and which of the various organisations operating in the locality he would prefer.

HOSPITALS (NURSES).

75. **Mr. Sorensen** asked the Minister of Health whether he has ascertained the approximate number of extra nurses now required by civilian hospitals to provide reasonable relief to existing overworked staffs and secure effective medical and nursing attention to patients; whether he can state the present average ratio of beds to nurses in these hospitals; and whether he will obtain information respecting the number of nurses at military or other hospitals who are not immediately necessary to those institutions but might be available for transfer to understaffed civilian hospitals?

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Mr. E. Brown: The returns received from hospital authorities in England and Wales indicate the number of additional nurses whom they would be ready to employ if they were available. The figure on this basis for nursing staff of all grades is 13,600. The average ratio of nurses employed to all beds is 24 nurses per 100 beds; the average ratio of nurses employed to all patients is 40 nurses per 100 patients. As regards the last part of the Question, I am in communication with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for War.

Mr. Sorensen: While thanking the Minister for the figures, may I ask whether he does not appreciate that in spite of the action taken in the past to remedy his disparity, there are still cases of grave overcrowding in the country which could be avoided if only we could get some proper liaison between the Minister and the War Office?

Mr. Brown: As I have said we are in touch on this matter. I have always found the War Office very co-operative on this matter.

WAR-TIME NURSERIES (MAYCRETE HUTS).

76. **Mr. Lindsay** asked the Minister of Health how many Maycrete huts for war nurseries are now erected; and whether he is satisfied with their suitability for this purpose?

Mr. E. Brown: The number of Maycrete huts so far ordered for war-time nurseries by local authorities is approximately 400. The majority of these have been delivered and are being erected. Reports so far received show that the huts can be made suitable for the purpose.

Mr. Lindsay: Is it not true that these huts have been turned down by the Building Research Station on behalf of the War Office?

Mr. Brown: That is a question for the Supply Departments.

NATIONAL FINANCE.

Requisitioned Securities.

77. **Sir J. Mellor** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of interest is assumed in arriving at the price to be paid for securities subject to an acquisition order, when allowance is made for the fact that a minimum period of eight weeks elapses between the date of the order and payment; whether the amount to be added to the market price at the date of the order is calculated after deduction of Income Tax; and whether recipients are authorised to treat this amount as income taxed at source?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir Kingsley Wood): The allowance made is based on a rate of 2½ per cent. per annum. The payment is a single capital payment, and no question arises of any part of it constituting income taxed at source.

Sir J. Mellor: As this is described in the official circular as an allowance made in respect of postponement, ought not trustees to be entitled to treat this as income? Otherwise, the beneficiaries lose income for eight weeks.

Sir K. Wood: The position is as I have stated it. The payment is a single capital payment.

Sir J. Mellor: Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer apply his mind to that perfectly simple and straightforward point?

Bank for International Settlements.

78. **Mr. Bellenger** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer the present position of the Bank for International Settlements; whether he proposes to continue membership of an international financial institution, a majority of whose directors are enemy nationals, and whether he will cause information to be laid before this House in an appropriate form of the transactions between the Bank of England and the Bank for International Settlements?

Sir K. Wood: On the outbreak of war, the Bank for International Settlements decided to maintain a strictly neutral attitude, and I am satisfied that this decision is being carried out. The Bank of England has entered into no fresh business with the Bank for International Settlements since the outbreak of war. It is not proposed to change our connection with the Bank for International Settlements, for the reasons explained in a reply given to the hon. Member for

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Southampton (Dr. Thomas) on 9th October, 1940, of which I am sending the hon. Member a copy.

Mr. Belleńger: How does the Bank maintain a strictly neutral attitude, when the vast majority of its directors are under enemy control? Does my right hon. Friend not think, particularly in view of the fact that no transactions have taken place during the war, that it is time to wind up this institution?

Sir K. Wood: No, Sir. As was pointed out in the reply to which I have referred my hon. Friend, this country has various interests under a trust agreement in relation to this matter.

Dr. Russell Thomas: Is not the Bank for International Settlements still functioning to some extent?

Sir K. Wood: Yes, Sir, to some extent.

WAR DAMAGE (PAYMENTS).

80. **Mr. Norman Bower** asked the Financial Secretary to the Treasury whether he is aware that builders are now refusing to estimate for the repair of war damage owing to the slowness with which they receive payment from the War Damage Commission; and whether he will take immediate steps to obviate those delays and speed up the administration of the War Damage Commission?

Captain Crookshank: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to a similar Question by my hon. Friend the Member for East Wolverhampton (Mr. Mander) on 3rd March. I understand that steps already taken have resulted in a substantial increase in the rate of payment.

Mr. A. Edwards: As these prices are all agreed before the work is done, why should not the payment be automatic and immediate?

Captain Crookshank: I am afraid I could not answer offhand for the Commission.

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS (PART-TIME WORK).

79. **Mr. Brooke** asked the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in which Departments, and to what extent, the Government have introduced the system of part-time work into their own service in order to utilise those whose domestic responsibilities prevent them from taking full-time work and to set free full-time staff for other duties?

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Captain Crookshank): All Departments have been instructed that, where practicable, part-time workers must be utilised in substitution for whole-time workers who are being released for service with the Forces or for vital war industry. Returns of staff are made at the end of every quarter, and until the return for the current quarter is available I am not in a position to say to what extent the employment of part-time workers in Departments has increased as a result of this instruction.

CLOTHES RATIONING.

PROSECUTION, STRATFORD.

82. **Mr. Thorne** asked the President of the Board of Trade what action was taken against the persons charged at the Stratford Police Court, West Ham, on 11th March, for selling clothing coupons at £10 a 1,000; and whether he is in a position to say where the men got the coupons from?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade (Captain Waterhouse): The effect of the sentence was that Parry and Proctor are to be imprisoned for 12 months, and Scotock for six months. In addition, Proctor was fined £100. The coupons were stolen from the food office at Walthamstow.

SERVING OFFICERS' COUPONS.

83. **General Sir George Jeffreys** asked the President of the Board of Trade whether he will reconsider the decision concerning the clothing coupons of serving officers in His Majesty's Forces; and whether he will make these coupons interchangeable, so that they may be used for the officers' families?

Captain Waterhouse: No, Sir. I regret that the stocks of clothing suitable exclusively for civilian use are insufficient to permit their purchase by officers of His Majesty's Forces.

Sir G. Jeffreys: Is my hon. Friend not of opinion that it is a very great hardship upon officers who have growing families that they are denied the same opportunity as civilians of using these coupons?

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Captain Waterhouse: This coupon arrangement for officers was specifically for the purpose of buying military clothes. The members of the families of the officers are able themselves to buy civilian clothes for their coupons, and it would be clearly wrong to allow these other coupons to be used for that purpose.

AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION.

NORTHERN IRELAND.

84. **Dr. Little** asked the Minister of State whether he will make arrangements whereby in provincial towns in Northern Ireland, where labour is available, the manufacture of certain aircraft parts and munitions of war should be made possible in order to speed up, and increase, the output of much-needed aeroplanes and war requisites?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Aircraft Production (Mr. Ben Smith): My right hon. Friend the Minister of Aircraft Production, who, in the absence of the Minister of Production, has been asked to reply, is at this moment seeing the Minister of Commerce, Northern Ireland, on this very matter. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Production proposes similarly to see Sir Basil Brooke shortly.

SIR ALEXANDER GIBB AND PARTNERS.

85. **Mr. Stokes** asked the Minister of Aircraft Production whether any fees were credited to Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners during the year ended 31st December, 1941, beyond the sum of £1,579 actually paid during that period; and the approximate value of the work still to be completed for his Ministry under this firm's supervision?

Mr. Ben Smith: No fees beyond the sum of £1,579 were paid or credited to the firm in question during the year ended 31st December, 1941, but fees were accruing to the firm on account of work done in that year. The estimated value of the work still to be completed under this firm's supervision is £560,000.

Mr. Stokes: What is the amount of the accrued fees?

Mr. Smith: Of the £326,000 work done in 1941, £134,000 was on a certain scheme for which no fees were paid, but £8,000 salaries were paid to the supervisory staff instead. Of the balance of the £326,000, fees on three contracts were calculated on the basis of 5 per cent., and the £4,000 carried a fixed fee of £200.

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (MR. CASEY'S APPOINTMENT).

The Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill): I thought it would be to the convenience of the House if I made this announcement at this moment. His Majesty has been pleased to approve the appointment of the right honourable Richard Gardiner Casey, D.S.O., M.C., to be Minister of State. Mr. Casey will be a member of the War Cabinet of the United Kingdom, and will represent the War Cabinet in the Middle East, where he will concert, on their behalf, the measures necessary for the prosecution of the war in that area, other than the conduct of operations. Mr. Casey will be described as Minister of State in the Middle East. Mr. Casey is at present Australian Minister in Washington; and I wish, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, to express our thanks to the Commonwealth Government for their consent to release Mr. Casey at this juncture from his important duties in the United States.

Mr. Stokes: When will Mr. Casey be taking up his official duties in Cairo?

The Prime Minister: Naturally, I would not be precise, for security reasons; but he has to wind up certain affairs in the United States with representatives of the Commonwealth who have arrived there, and after that he will naturally consult with us as to the British aspects of his new duties.

Sir Percy Harris: In what relation will Mr. Casey be to the House of Commons? Will a Minister reply for him, and will he be a full Member of the Cabinet, or will he retain his seat in the Australian Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I am not able to answer that last point; but, as far as this House is concerned, a Member of the War Cabinet will answer for him. Mr. Casey will be a member of the United Kingdom War Cabinet for all purposes, although his duties lie outside this country.

Archivo Histórico — Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, Argentina

Mr. Maxton: Will no attempt be made to make the Minister of State a Member of this House or of the other House?

The Prime Minister: Neither of those solutions would be impossible; but, as a matter of fact, there are precedents in time of war for Ministers who are His Majesty's subjects from the Empire holding office in this country without being Members of either House of Parliament.

Mr. Granville: Will not this announcement give great satisfaction throughout the British Empire? Will Mr. Casey be a Member of this House; and will he be given the same wide powers as his predecessor in Cairo had?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir; certainly he will have the same powers. As to the rest of the Question, I do not think it necessary at the moment. I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the pleasure with which this announcement will be received throughout the British Empire, and I see no reason why he should not share in it himself.

DAILY MIRROR CARTOON.

Mr. Spens (*by Private Notice*) asked the Home Secretary whether he has seen a cartoon recently published in the "Daily Mirror" of a distressed seaman on a raft over the words "The price of petrol has been raised by a penny"; and as this suggestion that seamen are risking their lives in order that bigger profits may be made is calculated to discourage seamen and readers of all classes from serving the country in its time of need and is conducive to defeatism, whether action cannot be taken to prevent a newspaper from publishing irresponsible matter likely to influence public opinion in a manner prejudicial to the efficient prosecution of the war?

Mr. H. Morrison: The cartoon in question is only one example, but a particularly evil example, of the policy and methods of a newspaper which, intent on exploiting an appetite for sensation and with a reckless indifference to the national interest and to the prejudicial effect on the war effort, has repeatedly published scurrilous misrepresentations, distorted and exaggerated statements and irresponsible generalisations. In the same issue the leading article stated:

> "... the accepted tip for Army leadership would, in plain truth, be this:—All who aspire to mislead others in war should be brass-buttoned boneheads, socially prejudiced, arrogant and fussy. A tendency to heart disease, apoplexy, diabetes and high blood pressure is desirable in the highest posts ..."

Reasonable criticism on specific points and persons is one thing; general, violent denunciation, manifestly tending to undermine the Army and depress the whole population, is quite another. Such insidious attacks are not to be excused by calls in other parts of the paper for more vigorous action. The Press in general recognises that the principle of freedom for the expression of opinion which Parliament and the Government are determined to maintain imposes on newspaper proprietors, editors and journalists an obligation to exercise that freedom with a proper sense of responsibility, and that if a particular paper so abuses that freedom that the war effort is hindered, that abuse is as injurious to the interests of the Press itself as to the national interest. The Government have decided that the right method of dealing with a newspaper which persistently disregards its public responsibility and the national interest is to make use of the powers contained in Defence Regulation 2D, which authorises the suppression of a paper that systematically publishes matter calculated to foment opposition to the successful prosecution of the war. The issue raised in such a case is—Will the continued publication of such a paper prejudice the successful prosecution of the war? On such a question it is incumbent on the Government to form a judgment, subject always to their responsibility to Parliament.

The provisions of Defence Regulation 2D cover not only overt or disguised incitements to refrain from helping the war effort on the ground, for example, that the war is waged for unworthy ends, but also the publication of matter which foments opposition to the prosecution of the war by depressing public support for the war effort, by poisoning the springs of national loyalty, and by creating a spirit of despair and defeatism. The fact that those responsible for the publication of such matter may not deliberately and wilfully desire to hinder the success of the Allied cause does not make the publication any less dangerous. A writer's motives and intentions are known only to himself. The test is what effect his words

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Morrison.]

may be expected to produce on the minds of others. The systematic publication of matter likely to spread a spirit of defeatism and to dissuade people from supporting the war effort, is not outside the scope of Regulation 2D because such matter is published with a reckless and unpatriotic indifference to its harmful effect rather than with a deliberate intention to produce such an effect. As it is possible that some of the persons responsible for the publication of such matter have not realised that it is within the ambit of Regulation 2D, it has been thought right in the first instance to take action by way of warning. I have seen those responsible for the publication of the " Daily Mirror," and I have made clear to them the considerations which I have outlined to the House. A watch will be kept on this paper and the course which the Government may ultimately decide to take will depend on whether those concerned recognise their public responsibility and take care to refrain from further publication of matter calculated to foment opposition to the successful prosecution of the war.

Mr. Shinwell: Does the Home Secretary appreciate that the statement he has just made, with all its possible ramifications, is a very serious one, that we are in danger of having the right of public opinion impinged upon, and that it fills some of us who venture to criticise the Government with alarm and despondency? May I ask—it is not a question for the right hon. Gentleman but for the Leader of the House—whether, in view of the very serious statement that has just been made, there will be an opportunity of debating this matter?

Mr. Morrison: On the first point of my hon. Friend, I realise that the statement that I have made is a serious one, and I hope that the proprietors and editor of the " Daily Mirror " will realise the same thing. On the other matter, I do not myself nor do the Government, who have given the matter the most careful consideration, regard this as having been in any way an attack upon the proper freedom of the Press or the expression of opinion. With regard to the last point, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House, with whom I have consulted, authorise me to say that, if there is any substantial body of opinion in the House that would like this matter debated, we will provide facilities for a Debate on a Motion and a Division.

Mr. Cocks: Will the Home Secretary arrange that in future newspapers in this country shall be edited by Parliamentary Private Secretaries?

Mr. Maxton: Is it the case that the offence to which attention has been called by the hon. and learned Member behind this Question was that this newspaper was pointing out that an important commodity necessary to the nation had had its price raised; and that it would not normally be an offence either for a newspaper or a public speaker to call attention to the fact that the price of a particular commodity was being unduly raised?

Mr. Morrison: The point of this cartoon was that it was a picture of a distressed seaman clinging to a raft in the middle of the sea.

Mr. Shinwell: Is that not true?

Mr. Morrison: Wait a moment, and I will answer the question. The only caption on the picture was, " The price of petrol has been raised by a penny—Official." Surely, that permission was given by the Government after very careful consideration. The implication of that was that the brave men of the Mercantile Marine, whom I would not put in the same street as some of the people who write these things—the implication is that these brave men were sacrificing their lives merely in order that the petrol combine should make another penny a gallon.

Mr. Shinwell: It is the waste of petrol.

Commander Locker-Lampson: Can the Home Secretary say whether Hearst is part-owner of this paper?

Sir Percy Harris: May I ask the Home Secretary whether he realises that the House of Commons attaches vital importance to the freedom of the Press and that therefore, apart from its merits, we would like to discuss a matter of this kind?

Mr. Morrison: The Government are aware of the importance which the House rightly attaches to the freedom of the Press. We have taken the earliest opportunity of informing the House of the action that I have taken this morning, and, as I say, the Government are perfectly willing to consider representations for a Debate.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Mr. Hore-Belisha: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it is always possible to create prejudice against what one does not like, and would he bear in mind that throughout this war a policy of suppression is calculated to do more harm to our cause and to divide the nation more than the cause of tolerance for which we entered the struggle?

Professor Savory: Is this not a question of a warning simply?

Mr. Morrison: On that, I would only say that the length of time which this kind of thing has been going on without His Majesty's Government taking action in the matter is itself a proof of the tolerance which has been exercised.

Mr. Garro Jones: My right hon. Friend referred to the proprietors and the editor of this paper. May I ask him whether he knows who the proprietors are, and, if so, would it not be a useful thing to inform the House?

Mr. Morrison: This is a newspaper which has not got a wealthy single owner as its proprietor. It is a mixed proprietorship. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who are they?"] I do not know that the information would be illuminating. It is one of those mixed financial controls in which you cannot trace a single directing financial influence, as far as I can see at present.

Commander Locker-Lampson: Hearst is part owner.

Mr. Cocks: You must not criticise the Government now.

HOUSEHOLD FOOD STOCKS (NEW ORDER).

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food (Major Lloyd George): It has been decided to revoke the Acquisition of Food (Excessive Quantities) Order, 1939, and to replace it by a new Order. The existing Order was made before the war, before any food was rationed. The new Order which will shortly be made, will provide that any food which is rationed or point rationed, as well as food which the consumer has produced or made himself, may be held without any restriction provided, of course, that the stocks have been legally acquired. Consequently, any person who is able to put by a proportion of his permitted ration of any food will be entitled to do so without limit or restriction. The Order will also provide that in the case of unrationed foods, the consumer may hold stocks provided that they do not exceed an amount reasonably necessary for consumption over a period of four weeks, or such longer period as may be justified if, in the view of the court which has to determine the question, circumstances of any exceptional character exist.

Colonel Arthur Evans: May I remind the right hon. and gallant Gentleman of the appeal which Lord Woolton made previous to the outbreak of war, or in the early days of September, 1939? That was an appeal to the householders throughout the country to store a certain quantity of tinned food. Is it illegal for that store still to be held and if it is, what means should be taken to dispose of it?

Major Lloyd George: The Order did not come into effect until 31st August, 1939, and therefore stocks acquired before that could not be affected by the Order.

Sir J. Mellor: Would the right hon. and gallant Gentleman make it perfectly clear that the storing of food legitimately acquired is not only permissible, but is actively to be encouraged?

Major Lloyd George: I think the terms of the statement which I have just made will make the position pretty clear. The Order was originally introduced before any rationing was in being and it is obvious that after rationing there could not be any large acquisitions of rationed foods.

Mr. Thorne: Is the Minister aware that hundreds of thousands of wage-earners have not sufficient food to store anything?

Mr. Levy: In future, before Orders are made, will due and adequate consideration be given to them so as to prevent something which is very distasteful to Parliament—that is bringing in an Order, and then, within a few weeks, cancelling it and bringing in another which is contradictory and diametrically opposed to it?

Major Lloyd George: The original Order was brought in two and a half years ago. No notice, apparently, was taken

Archivo Histórico · Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

[Major Lloyd George.]
of it and the public were not worried about it, until about three weeks ago. As soon as we discovered that there was general apprehension, we immediately altered it.

Mr. Sorensen: Was that not partly due to the statement of the right hon. and gallant Gentleman?

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE.

Mr. Greenwood: May I ask the Leader of the House whether he has any statement to make on the future course of Business and the date of the Budget?

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Mr. Eden): Before announcing the forthcoming Business, I would like to make a general statement on the future Sittings of the House. We have obtained now all the essential financial Business which is required before the end of the financial year, and the Government propose that the House should adjourn for the Easter Recess on the next third Sitting Day. The Government believe that many hon. Members will welcome a longer Adjournment than is usual at this time of year, to give them more time to visit their constituencies. Ministers affected by the recent changes in the Government will also be relieved of attendance upon this House, and thereby enabled to devote their whole time to their Departmental responsibilities. The promised Debate on Production will take place on the next first and second Sitting Days. We shall also ask the House to take the Second Reading of the Army and Air Force (Annual) Bill during the week and any Amendments to the Landlord and Tenant Bill which may be received from another place. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget on the second Sitting Day after the Recess. A further statement will be made as to the arrangements for that day, but it will, no doubt, be generally convenient to follow the procedure of last year.

Mr. Stokes: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether it is the intention of the Government that this House should rise for the period mentioned without having any possibility of examining the position in regard to the loss of Malaya and Singapore; and does he realise that there will be great feeling in the country unless this matter is debated in the House before there is any long Adjournment?

Mr. Eden: The position about Malaya and Singapore has been fully explained. We have asked for those reports, which will be received, I hope, before very long. It may be that in the meantime, though I cannot tell, we shall get some information from other sources, but the hope is not very great, conditions being what they are and our commanders having been captured. I can tell the House that whatever information we have will be made fully available to the House, whether it comes from General Gordon Bennett or from any other source. We do not wish to conceal information, but we cannot give information that we have not got.

Sir Irving Albery: Arising out of what the right hon. Gentleman has just said, and especially his reference to the desire of Members to visit their constituencies, may I draw the attention of the Prime Minister to the fact that if we visit our constituencies, we are bound to be asked a number of questions about the present war situation? Speaking for myself, and I believe the view is shared by many other Members, we have recently been kept very scarce of information as to the position. We know we have been going through a very critical time, and I feel that before we part for this Recess, if it is within the power of the Government to give Members some further information on the general war situation, then Members would be far better fitted to go into their constituencies than they can possibly be in present circumstances.

Mr. Eden: I fully appreciate what my hon. Friend says, and it is not the Government's position that they want to withhold any information, with the proviso always, of course, that it is not of value to the enemy, but I fear, on the information at present available, there is not likely to be anything that I can add before the House rises.

Mr. Mander: Will the right hon. Gentleman be good enough to arrange that when the Debate on Production takes place the Minister of Supply and the Minister of Aircraft Production will be present, in view of the short time which the Minister of State has had to familiarise himself with all the details?

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Mr. Eden: The Minister of Production will open the Debate.

Mr. Mander: Yes, but I am asking whether the right hon. Gentleman will arrange for the Minister of Supply and the Minister of Aircraft Production to be present.

Mr. Eden: I have no doubt the usual arrangements will be made.

Captain Cunningham-Reid: Will there be an opportunity of discussing the Bucknill Report in this House, in secret or otherwise?

Mr. Eden: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister explained yesterday why this Report could not possibly be made public. To do so would give very valuable information to the enemy, under a wide number of heads. The Government have considered whether it would be possible, in secret or otherwise, to give any information based on the Report or any excerpts from it. I am bound to tell the House that we feel it would be impossible. If you are to give a fair and balanced account of what the Report says, and do justice to its value, I am afraid there is no choice, no alternative, between complete publication of the Report and withholding it, and I am convinced that complete publication would be greatly against the national interest.

Captain Cunningham-Reid: Could we not have a Debate in secret?

Sir Frank Sanderson: Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that there is no truth in the report that the country is to suffer from a large number of Ministerial speeches during the Recess? Is he also aware that the country would very much prefer that the Government should get on with the prosecution of the war?

Mr. Eden: I cannot answer for the speeches of my colleagues, but I think most of us have lots of work to do.

Colonel Evans: Can we understand from my right hon. Friend that the Debate on Production during the first two days of the next series of Sittings will include matters relating to Aircraft Production, or will there be a separate Debate, to cover Aircraft Production, in secret at a later date?

Mr. Eden: Yes, Sir, it is the intention to have a separate Debate to cover Aircraft Production.

Sir Stanley Reed: While I recognise that the Government cannot give us information which they do not possess with regard to Malaya and Singapore, will my right hon. Friend give the House and the country a definite assurance now, that when the time is ripe there shall be a public inquiry on the lines of the Dardenelles Commission into the whole of the calamitous events resulting in the loss of Malaya and culminating in the fall of Singapore? With nothing less will the House and the country be satisfied.

Mr. Eden: I cannot give an undertaking of that kind. Indeed, my hon. Friend must appreciate the position in which the Government now are, and I know he will appreciate the difference in the circumstances, between this occasion and the occasion of the Dardanelles inquiry.

Mr. Stokes: Does the right hon. Gentleman really expect the country to accept the statement of the Government that a month after the loss of Singapore and Malaya they are still not in a position to convey any information to this House? Does it not put the Government in a very bad light?

Mr. Eden: The circumstances with regard to Singapore are known in that all our commanders were captured, but other circumstances are not known. I feel sure that the country will believe I am telling the truth when I say that I shall be only too glad to give any information when I can which will not be useful to the enemy.

Mr. Cocks: May I put a Question with regard to future times of Sittings? Will the proposed time of Sitting on Budget Day form a precedent for future Sittings?

Mr. Eden: No, Sir, no precedent.

KITCHEN AND REFRESHMENT ROOMS (HOUSE OF COMMONS).

Special Report from the Select Committee brought up and read; to lie upon the Table, and to be printed [No. 68].

Archivo Histórico Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

BOMBAY, BARODA AND CENTRAL INDIA RAILWAY BILL.

Reported, with Amendments, from the Committee on Unopposed Bills (with Report on the Bill).

Bill, as amended, and Report to lie upon the Table; Report to be printed.

MESSAGE FROM THE LORDS.

That they have agreed to—

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill, without Amendment.

WRITTEN ANSWERS.

INDIA (MOMIN POPULATION).

Mr. Barr asked the Secretary of State for India on what grounds he estimates the number of Momins who disavow the Moslem League as being 4,000,000 to 5,000,000?

Mr. Amery: In view of the fact that, according to the Census report for 1931, the Momins then numbered only a little over 3,000,000, I could hardly give credence to the suggestion that they had grown to 45,000,000 since that date and considered a Press version of the telegram sent by the All-India Momin Conference, giving the figure as 4,000,000 to 5,000,000 as being obviously nearer the mark. I will however make further inquiry into the matter as I have received further telegrams asserting that the figure I gave was incorrect. I should add that I have also had a telegram from the President of the Momin Conference, presumably a separate body, claiming that, politically, the Momins are solidly behind the Moslem League.

TRADE AND COMMERCE.

Clothes Rationing.

Mr. Kirby asked the President of the Board of Trade whether he will sympathetically consider the urgent desirability of introducing a new coupon or other system whereby workpeople engaged in filthy and heavy occupations necessitating constant replacement of overalls will be able to secure such replacements without using ordinary coupons which are required for ordinary clothing replacements; and if such special arrangements are not possible by direct issue of coupons to the workers concerned, will he consider the urgent desirability of instituting a scheme whereby the employers of such men may purchase overalls in bulk without coupons for sale to their workers?

Captain Waterhouse: Claims for supplementary clothing coupons from workers whose normal ration is insufficient to cover their needs of working clothes including overalls, should be submitted by the trade unions concerned to the Board of Trade through the Trades Union Congress.

Shaving Soaps and Creams.

Viscountess Astor asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Food whether he will take steps to bring shaving soap and shaving cream within the Limitation of Supplies Order, in view of the fact that their manufacture involves the use of glycerine, oil and metal tubes?

Mr. Dalton: I have been asked to reply. Shaving soap and shaving creams are at present excepted from control under the Limitation of Supplies Orders. The question of the future scope of these Orders is now under consideration and I have noted the Noble Lady's suggestion.

OFFICES OR PLACES OF PROFIT UNDER THE CROWN.

Mr. Mander asked the Prime Minister whether he is now able to make a statement with reference to various recommendations in the report from the Select Committee on Offices or Places of Profit under the Crown which require action other than by means of legislation?

Mr. Attlee: Part 1 of the Select Committee's Report is still under consideration by His Majesty's Government and a further statement will be made in due course. As regards Part 2, I need only deal with paragraph 86, in which the Select Committee considered the position of Members who, by virtue of emergency legislation, are occupying posts which in normal times disqualify for membership. The Government fully endorse the principles set out in this paragraph, and are making special arrangements to bring it to the notice of any Members to whom certificates are issued under the House of Commons Disqualification (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1939.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

GERMAN WARSHIPS' ESCAPE (BUCKNILL REPORT).

Mr. Mander asked the Prime Minister whether he is now able to make any statement with regard to the Bucknill Committee of inquiry into the escape of the "Scharnhorst," "Gneisenau" and "Prince Eugen"?

Mr. Attlee: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave yesterday in answer to a Question by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Loughborough (Major Kimball).

MAN-POWER (ECONOMICAL USE).

Mr. Craven-Ellis asked the Prime Minister whether he will move for the appointment of a Select Committee to investigate the misuse of man-power in Government Departments, controlled industry and transport?

Mr. Attlee: The various Government Departments responsible for the organisation of public business and industry are fully aware of the importance of the economical use of man-power. Many steps have already been taken in this connection and the matter is under constant examination and review. I do not think that a Select Committee would usefully assist in the work which is already being done.

QUESTIONS TO MINISTERS.

Dr. Morgan asked the Prime Minister whether he is aware of the non-informative attitude adopted by many Government Departments in their answers to Parliamentary Questions; and whether he will take steps to draw the attention of Departments to the dangers of their present outlook by side-tracking parliamentary desire for accurate information?

Mr. Attlee: No, Sir. I do not accept the statement in the first part of my hon. Friend's Question.

Mr. Glenvil Hall asked the Prime Minister whether he will name the Minister to whom Questions relating to radio communication between the armed forces in the field should be addressed?

Mr. Attlee: Questions on this subject which necessarily affect the three Services should be addressed to the Prime Minister.

TOWN-PLANNING AND BUILDING REGULATIONS (EXEMPTIONS).

Mr. Bossom asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works and Buildings whether he can give a list of every corporation and authority, etc., which, by private or special legislation, is now exempted in whole or in part from laws affecting town planning or other building regulations?

Mr. Hicks: The information asked for is not available and I do not think it would be justifiable to absorb the amount of labour which would be required for its compilation.

ARMED FORCES (RADIO EQUIPMENT).

Mr. A. Edwards asked the Minister of Supply whether he is aware that radio telephone equipment in tanks, aircraft, infantry units and ships, is imperfectly co-ordinated, and that the sets provided do not enable satisfactory communication to be maintained; and which department of his Ministry is responsible for this equipment?

Mr. Assheton: This is not a matter which is the sole concern of my right hon. Friend, but inquiries are being made and I will communicate with my hon. Friend. The department of the Ministry responsible for the design and development of radio equipment for the Army is that of the Controller-General of Research and Development.

JAPANESE NATIONALS (INTERNMENT).

Mr. Cocks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he can give an estimate of the number of Japanese subjects who have been interned in the British Empire and in Allied countries?

Mr. Law: The number of Japanese interned in the United Kingdom has already been stated by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in reply to an earlier Question by my hon. Friend. The number interned in the Dominions is approximately 1,300. Figures for the rest of the Empire have not yet been received, though they have been asked for. Information regarding Allied countries is not available.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

SINGAPORE (BRITISH SUBJECTS).

Sir C. Edwards asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he has any means of ascertaining the position of the men and women left in Singapore; if so, will he state the position of Mr. Lewis Ivor Lewis, an official in the Colonial Office there, and where people can write for information about relatives or friends?

Mr. Harold Macmillan: I much regret that at the present time there is no channel of communication with Singapore, but every effort is being made to obtain information through the Protecting Power and through the International Red Cross Committee. As already announced in the Press, inquiries about British civilian and local volunteer forces personnel should be addressed to the Inquiry and Casualty Department of the Colonial Office. I regret that there is no information available at present regarding Mr. L. I. Lewis. Any information received will be notified to the next-of-kin at once.

HONG KONG (CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES).

Mr. Leslie asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, whether he has any information as to the safety of Christian missionaries and their families who were in Hong Kong during the invasion of the Japanese forces?

Mr. Harold Macmillan: No, Sir. My hon. Friend will have heard the statement made by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on 10th March, to which I regret that I can add nothing.

BRITISH GUIANA AND BRITISH HONDURAS.

Mr. Creech Jones asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies what schemes have been submitted under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in respect to British Guiana and British Honduras either by the local government or Sir Frank Stockdale; and which have been adopted or are under consideration?

Mr. Harold Macmillan: Only one application has so far been received from British Honduras. This is for the building of a road from Belize to Cayo and a scheme has been made under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act to cover it. Twenty-two applications, in respect of the following matters, have been received from British Guiana: Appointment of a malariologist, extension of campaign against yellow fever mosquito, medical service for the aboriginal Indian population, material for health education instruction, equipment for a venereal diseases clinic, apparatus for the diagnosis of tuberculosis, broadcasting, lady health officer, training for sanitary inspectors, school medical officer, improvements in irrigation in West Demerara, model houses for health centre staff at Anna Regina, animal husbandry, livestock officer, marketing officer, sistor tutor, survey, improvement of river communications, experimental community centre, principal and instructor at Kingston trading centre, stock farming, buildings and equipment for Georgetown and Kitty boys' clubs, boys' work secretary, hospital secretary.

Schemes in respect of the first six of these have been approved, while the last has been deferred until after the war owing to difficulty in obtaining the necessary personnel. Of the remainder, two have been referred back to the Governor for further information, while the rest are under consideration either by the Comptroller or by Government Departments in this country. Delay has occurred in several cases owing to difficulty in obtaining suitable candidates to fill the proposed appointments, while other applications have only very recently been received. In addition to these, the Comptroller has made small grants in respect of the following items—prizes for competitions amongst allotment holders in Georgetown and New Amsterdam, construction of full-scale working sanitary models for use at Anna Regina Centre, and construction of houses.

GOLD COAST (TUBERCULOSIS AND SILICOSIS).

Mr. Creech Jones asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies what measures of prevention and treatment are being adopted in the Gold Coast for dealing with silicosis?

Mr. Harold Macmillan: Two medical officers of the Gold Coast medical service

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

undertook an investigation into the incidence of tuberculosis and silicosis amongst mine-workers in the Tarkwa area of the Gold Coast between April, 1940, and January, 1941. Their interim report, which has been published by the Gold Coast Government, reveals that considerable progress has been made with the investigation of this problem. Arrangements were subsequently made for one of the medical officers who is a specialist in these diseases to visit South Africa to obtain the advice of the authorities in Johannesburg who have special knowledge and experience of these problems. Before adequate preventive measures can be introduced, it is necessary to obtain fuller information regarding the dust counts of the atmosphere at the various working places, and arrangements have been made for officers of the mines department to receive instruction in this subject. The report showed that the incidence of pulmonary tuberculosis was higher than that of silicosis and suggested that it was a much greater menace to the health of mine employees. The medical officer referred to above has now been freed from all routine duties to allow him to devote his full time to the investigation of the incidence of tuberculosis. All known cases of these diseases are receiving the necessary treatment, but the elimination of silicosis must of course depend on methods of prevention.

NORTHERN RHODESIA (CONSTITUTION).

Mr. Creech Jones asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies whether changes in the period of service of nominated members of the Legislative and Executive Council of Northern Rhodesia have yet been proposed; and whether other constitutional changes are contemplated?

Mr. Harold Macmillan: Under the Northern Rhodesian Constitutional Instruments there is no prescribed period of appointment for the nominated members of the Legislative and Executive Councils. The life of the Legislative Council is three years. But it is open to the Governor to recommend a nominated member for re-appointment. In practice, the period of appointment of nominated members to the Executive Council is normally for so long as the persons concerned remain members of the Legislative Council.

ARMED FORCES (PENSIONS AND GRANTS).

Mr. Rostron Duckworth asked the Minister of Pensions whether he will review the position of servicemen who recover damages, for pensionable loss of limb or other disabilities, resulting from accidents whilst on duty, and in whose cases the full weekly value of the damages so recovered is deducted from the disability pension normally payable; and whether, as the men concerned are disqualified from receiving National Health Insurance cash benefits by reason of receiving damages, he will make some abatement in the weekly deduction from pension?

Sir W. Womersley: As stated by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in answer to a Question by the hon. Member on Tuesday last, the method of reckoning such damages in the assessment of pension is at present under review.

Miss Rathbone asked the Minister of Pensions whether, in cases of men serving in the Army or Air Force who have received war service grants in respect of civil liabilities or other special claims, and have subsequently obtained commissions, the amount of the grant is reduced in proportion to the higher rate of pay; or whether it is taken into account that messing bills and other necessary charges incidental to commissioned rank, may actually make the man's immediate financial position worse than before he obtained promotion?

Mr. Paling: When a man is granted a commission his claim to war service grant is assessed afresh, and, in computing the amount of his pay which he can be expected to contribute to his family, regard is had to his personal needs as an officer and to the expenses incidental to that status. Where officers' families suffer hardship I am afraid this is due much more to omission to apply for a grant than to the method of assessment.

WAR DAMAGE ACT (REGULATIONS).

Sir R. Glyn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any regulations have been drafted on Section 3 (5) of the War Damage Act; and, if not, when will they be ready, in view of the uncertainty of the present position?

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Sir K. Wood: The drafting of the regulations to which the hon. Member refers is a matter of considerable difficulty. The subject has been under constant consideration in consultation with the War Damage Commission and I am hopeful that shortly it will be possible to issue the regulations.

EDUCATION.

Returned Evacuees.

Sir E. Cadogan asked the President of the Board of Education whether he contemplates making any provision, in the case of children who have reached the school-leaving age and whose schooling has been interrupted by their return from the evacuation to the vulnerable areas before proper facilities for their education could be provided, with a view to their attending some description of continuation class to make good the deficiency caused by such interruption?

Mr. Butler: I regret that the form of continued education suggested by my hon. and gallant Friend would not be legally enforceable. No one would doubt its desirability, but it would make demands on the teaching power of the country which could not be met in present circumstances.

Youths (Registration Scheme).

Mr. Lipson asked the President of the Board of Education what action is taken with regard to youths who do not come to be interviewed when summoned under the National Registration Scheme?

Mr. Butler: I understand that it is the general practice of local education authorities, in cases of failure to respond to the invitation to attend for interview, to renew the invitation and to follow up such cases.

NATIONAL WAR EFFORT.

War-time Nurseries.

Sir H. Webbe asked the Minister of Health what is the anticipated approximate capital cost of providing nurseries for the children of munition workers; and what is the anticipated approximate cost per head of maintaining those nurseries in day-time and at night-time, respectively?

Mr. E. Brown: Where a hut is provided for use as a nursery the estimated expenditure on preparation, site, shell, erection and equipment is about £2,000 for a nursery for 40 children. When existing premises are used they are usually rented and capital cost depends on the amount of adaptation required. The cost of maintenance varies according to the locality and hours of opening, but is estimated as on an average approximately 3s. to 4s. per place per day, of which the mothers are expected to contribute 1s. Where nurseries are open by night as well as by day it is estimated that the cost will be approximately half as much again as for day nurseries.

British Broadcasting Corporation (Women Employees).

Sir Smedley Crooke asked the Minister of Information the number of women employed, in any capacity, by the British Broadcasting Corporation between the ages of 20 and 30 years?

Mr. Bracken: The number is 1,750. Discussions are being held with the Ministry of Labour in order to decide how many of these women can be called up without prejudice to the work of national importance on which the B.B.C. is engaged.

Part-time Work (Insurance Contributions).

Mr. Hammersley asked the Minister of Labour whether, in order to encourage part-time employment in war work, he will introduce regulations to permit the payment of partial insurance contributions, associated with proportional normal benefits?

Mr. Bevin: I have this matter under consideration in conjunction with my right hon. Friends the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Piece-work, Bishopsgate Street Station, London.

Colonel Burton asked the Minister of Labour whether his attention has been called to the labour position at Bishopsgate Street Station, London, whereby through the slow action of certain porters the drivers of lorries have had to leave without the goods they had been detailed to collect; and what steps have been taken to remedy this state of affairs?

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Mr. Bevin: I understand there is some difficulty here in regard to piece-work arrangements and that steps are being taken for a joint investigation by the company and the trade union concerned.

LOWER GRADE MEN.

Mr. Emery asked the Minister of Labour (1) what steps he proposes to ensure that those persons hitherto classified in Grade 3, and who are not employed in any form of national service, should be compulsorily mobilised for some suitable form of national service or training;

(2) whether, in view of the need for man-power economy and utilisation in all forms of national service, he will arrange a fresh medical examination for all persons under 35 years of age who have been previously rejected for military service with a view to their mobilisation for some appropriate work in the war effort?

Mr. Bevin: Subject to physical ability to undertake the work, all men rejected for military service on medical grounds are considered for transfer to work of national importance or training and directions are issued as appropriate. In cases of doubt as to physical fitness arrangements are made for independent medical examination, under direction if necessary. I do not think a medical examination is necessary or desirable in every case. I can, however, assure my hon. Friends that the importance of utilising the services of these men to the fullest extent possible is appreciated by my Department, and the machinery for reviewing cases is at present under examination.

FOOD SUPPLIES.

WHOLEMEAL BREAD.

Mr. Rostron Duckworth asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether he can give any estimate of the annual saving in shipping space which will result from making wholemeal bread compulsory in place of white bread?

Major Lloyd George: No, Sir. It is not in the national interest that the quantity of foodstuffs imported into this country in time of war should be disclosed. Any estimate of the saving in imports which might result from the raising of the extraction rate would be equivalent to disclosing the total quantity of wheat imported.

FISH (DISTRIBUTION).

Mr. Mander asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food why it is proposed that, in allocating fish from all ports, except Scottish, to London, all surplus supplies of fish from all ports, including Scottish, shall be sent to London?

Major Lloyd George: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Moss Side (Mr. Rostron Duckworth) on 17th March.

POULTRY AND GAME (IMPORTS FROM EIRE).

Mr. McNeil asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food what were the values, with or without duties, of the importations from Eire of poultry, rabbits, game, etc., at the present 10 distributing centres for the period 1st January to 31st December, 1938; what are the values of the allocations at present for any suitable period to the same 10 centres; and the values of allocations to Greenock for the same two periods?

Major Lloyd George: The particulars asked for in the first part of the Question are not available. As regards the second part of the Question the publication of information as to importations into the United Kingdom has, in the national interest, been suspended during the war, and the present values of imports of poultry, rabbits, game, etc., cannot therefore be disclosed.

INSHORE FISHING (RESTRICTIONS).

Mr. Groves asked the Minister of Agriculture whether, in order to augment the nation's food supply, he will authorise, through the various sea fisheries committees, the relaxation of the inshore fishing restrictions and permit the public to use private fisheries, retaining the restrictions against taking undersized fish?

Mr. Hudson: The principal restrictions imposed by local by-laws on the use of trawl and seine nets in inshore waters have already been lifted, except in the case of the largest types of fishing vessels. I doubt whether any more general relaxation of restrictions would produce beneficial results, but I am at present in consultation with the Sea Fisheries Committees as to the effect of the existing relaxation. There are very few private

Archivo Histórico Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

fisheries in tidal waters, apart from shell fisheries, and I do not think that there is any necessity to take special steps to throw open these fisheries to the public.

TEA STOCKS (NORTHERN IRELAND).

Dr. Little asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food whether, in view of the fact that tea taken illegally across the border is being sold at a price as high as 20s. per pound, he will take immediate steps to conserve the stocks of tea in Northern Ireland where a shortage may soon be experienced?

Major Lloyd George: Yes, Sir. All practicable steps are being taken to conserve the stocks of tea in Northern Ireland.

NIGERIA (REVENUE).

Mr. Creech Jones asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies what was the revenue of the Nigerian Government in 1937-38, its principal items and what sums were expended on account of salaries, allowances, gratuities and pensions of European officials, pensions, leave pay, family allotments, etc., of Europeans, passages of British officials and their dependants and debt charges, interest, sinking fund, etc.?

Mr. Harold Macmillan: The total revenue of the Nigerian Government in 1937-38 was £7,342,450 7s. 8d.; the principal items being: Customs, £3,504,807 13s. 2d.; Interest, £913,192 14s. 11d.; and Direct Taxes, £854,156 16s. 6d. The annual accounts do not distinguish between payments in respect of European and African officials. The amount expended on pensions and gratuities for all officials was £530,089 16s. 7d. The expenditure on ocean passages was £109,932 2s. 5d. Payments for debt charges, including interest and sinking fund, were £1,748,193 15s.

MILITARY SERVICE (TEACHERS).

Dr. Russell Thomas asked the Minister of Labour whether the Schedule of Reserved Occupations extends to all classes of teachers?

Mr. Bevin: No, Sir. Reservation under the Schedule extends only to whole-time members of University teaching staffs, to whole-time teachers in an institution or institutions recognised as efficient by the Board of Education or under inspection by the Scottish Education Department, or which, on the recommendation of the appropriate Government Department is, or are, regarded as entitled to similar treatment, and to whole-time teachers in approved schools.

NAVAL LOSSES (PUBLICATION).

Sir W. Davison asked the First Lord of the Admiralty in what circumstances have detailed particulars of the losses of ships and personnel suffered by Great Britain and her Allies in the recent three days' battle of Java been published, thereby giving valuable and reliable information to the enemy, while on the other hand the only statement available with regard to enemy losses is that these are not known; and whether arrangements will be made between the Allied Powers that information of this kind of value to the enemy should not be published, as is the practice of the British Admiralty in refraining from giving particulars of the destruction of U-boats?

Mr. George Hall: The practice of the Admiralty since the outbreak of war has been to publish losses of His Majesty's ships due to enemy action as soon as possible after the event. It is realised that the enemy may thus occasionally be presented with information, but the disadvantages of concealing our losses from the public are manifest, and it is not proposed to alter present arrangements. In the case of the battle of Java, the enemy had already claimed the sinking of the ships concerned. The practice of the Admiralty is similar to that of our Allies and the Dominions. The communique of 14th March was an agreed one.

AGRICULTURE.

VETERINARY INSPECTORATE (WOMEN).

Colonel Carver asked the Minister of Agriculture whether, in view of the nation's urgent need of all available manpower, he will consider in future utilising the services of qualified women veterinary surgeons as veterinary inspectors, so as to avoid the necessity of employing men of military age to fill such appointments?

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Mr. Hudson: I must remind by hon. Friend that veterinary surgeons of all ages, whether employed in the Ministry or elsewhere, are reserved from service in H.M. Forces. The admission of qualified women veterinary surgeons to the Ministry's veterinary inspectorate is at present under consideration but in view of the large number of vacancies in this inspectorate their admission would not avoid the necessity of employing male veterinary surgeons.

PRICES.

Mr. De la Bère asked the Minister of Agriculture whether, in view of the scarcity of reliable figures for the cost of production of commodities on the farms throughout the country, he will confer with the Lord President of the Council, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with a view to the publication of the data upon which the recent adjustment of farm prices was prepared, since the publication of this data would do much to dispel the existing impression that the awards and adjustments had not been a generous interpretation of what the agricultural industry is entitled to under the Government's pledge?

Mr. Hudson: No, Sir. I have nothing to add to the public statements which I have made on this subject, except to say that the recent adjustments of farm prices represent a settlement which is just both to the farmers and the taxpayers.

FARM SALE, CHESHIRE.

Mr. De la Bère asked the Minister of Agriculture whether he will have inquiries made regarding the conditions under which the Goldsmith House Farm, Burleydam, Cheshire, was acquired by a member of the district committee of the war agricultural executive committee in this area?

Mr. Hudson: I understand that the farm was offered for sale to the sitting tenant, who refused to buy. The property was then advertised for sale by public auction and the present owner purchased it in October, 1941, by private treaty, the auction being cancelled. The fact that the purchaser is a member of the Southern Area Committee of the Cheshire War Agricultural Executive Committee does not appear to have any relevance as the transaction was a private one in regard to which neither committee was concerned.

JUVENILE OFFENDERS (" FUN FAIRS ").

Sir W. Smithers asked the Home Secretary whether his attention has been called to the proceedings at the East London Juvenile Court during the week ended 14th March, and to the cause of the offences being the existence of Fun Fairs; and, in view of the necessity for conserving oil and coal, will he take the necessary steps to close all Fun Fairs in the country?

Mr. H. Morrison: I have seen the letter of the chairman of the juvenile court referred to which was printed in the Press and I have received representations on the same subject from other quarters. Inquiry is being made, and I will communicate the result to my hon. Friend.

CINEMAS (SUNDAY OPENING).

Colonel Macnamara asked the Home Secretary whether he is aware that there are still local authorities in Britain and Northern Ireland who do not allow the opening of Sunday cinemas; that it means that thousands of British and American soldiers, sailors and airmen have nowhere to go on a Sunday; and whether he will take steps to order cinemas to open in the wider interests of the troops temporarily inhabiting such localities?

Mr. H. Morrison: Yes, I am aware of the facts stated in the first two parts of this Question; but as my hon. and gallant Friend knows, this is a subject on which there is an acute difference of opinion in some areas and Parliament decided in 1932 that the matter must be determined by local public opinion. Many local authorities on the recommendation of the competent naval, military or air force authority have decided to take advantage of the simplified procedure for Sunday opening provided by Defence Regulation 42B. No less than 223 Orders submitted in pursuance of that Regulation have been approved by Parliament. Greatly as I appreciate the need for giving adequate opportunities for recreation to His Majesty's Forces, I do not think it would be desirable to attempt to override local opinion as regards Sunday opening. Sunday opening in Scotland is a matter for my right hon. colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland, and in Northern Ireland for the Government of Northern Ireland.

Archivo Histórico · Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

Mr. Rhys Davies asked the Home Secretary why he made an Order, under Regulation 42B, for opening places of entertainment in Bridgend, in view of the fact that the Bridgend, Glamorgan, Urban District Council approached the competent military authority instigating him to request the council to make representations for the making of such an Order?

Mr. H. Morrison: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to-day to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. E. Williams).

CIVIL DEFENCE.

LOCAL COMMITTEES (COMPOSITION).

Mr. Bartlett asked the Home Secretary whether, in order to increase public confidence, he will give instructions to abolish the secrecy now surrounding the composition of local defence committees?

Mr. H. Morrison: I hope shortly to make an announcement which will cover, among other things, the work of these committees.

DEBRIS CLEARANCE (BUILDING OPERATIVES, EMPLOYMENT).

Mr. Bossom asked the Home Secretary whether any useful purpose is being served by allowing large numbers of building trades operatives to continue their activities at the sites of bombed property after all useful salvage has been taken and the structures have been made safe, when their services are seriously needed in connection with work essential to the war effort?

Mr. H. Morrison: Local and other authorities concerned have been told that structures should be made safe, highways cleared of debris, useful salvage taken, and fire risks and danger to public health removed. Some further clearing up is occasionally required by considerations of morale. In the main the labour employed would not be suitable for transfer to constructional work, but if my hon. Friend is aware of any instances in which he thinks that building trade operatives are being used on work which is unnecessary perhaps he will send me particulars. I would add that in the London region the number of men engaged on debris clearance has been reduced by 63 per cent. from the peak figure at one time employed.

PERSONNEL (INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYMENT).

Captain Gammans asked the Home Secretary whether he is aware of the growing sense of frustration amongst full-time Civil Defence workers at the delay in inaugurating schemes of employment for them during their on-duty and off-duty periods; and when he expects to be able to announce details of such schemes?

Mr. H. Morrison: As I informed the hon. Member for Balham and Tooting (Mr. Doland) on 26th February, the main line of approach to the removal of the sense of frustration amongst full-time Civil Defence workers must be by the method of releasing them for approved industrial employment away from their depots. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Labour and National Service and I are pressing forward with arrangements for their release on as large a scale as practicable at the earliest possible date. An industrial registration of whole-time members of the Civil Defence Services is taking place next week to ascertain to what extent the Services contain men or women who, if they can be spared from or replaced in their present duties, would be able to give more effective service to the war effort by being released permanently or temporarily to other employment. This, however, does not preclude the immediate release of particular individuals for whom approved employment can now be found. Consultations on the whole subject are to take place within the next few days with representatives of the local authorities and the Trade Union Consultative Committee representing the Civil Defence personnel. I hope to be in a position to announce before Easter a comprehensive scheme which will deal not only with the release of men or women for industrial employment but with the provision of opportunities for making a more direct contribution to the war effort by those who must necessarily remain whole-time in the Services. A considerable indirect contribution to the war effort is already made by members of the Services in their off-duty periods, and much of the local authorities' non-civil defence work is already done with the aid of Civil Defence personnel during their duty periods as well as in their off-duty periods.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

HORSE-RACING (CHELTENHAM).

Sir W. Smithers asked the Home Secretary how many people and how many motor cars there were at Cheltenham Races on Saturday, 14th February?

Mr. H. Morrison: I am informed that no race meeting took place at Cheltenham on 14th February.

GOVERNMENT OF BURMA ACT, 1935.

SHAN STATES FEDERAL FUND ORDER.

The Secretary of State for Burma (Mr. Amery): I beg to move,

"That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty in pursuance of the provisions of Section 157 of the Government of Burma Act, 1935, praying that the Government of Burma (Shan States Federal Fund) Order, 1942, be made in the form of the draft laid before Parliament."

The purpose of this Order is to extend for another two years the temporary arrangement governing the provisions for finance for the Shan States of Burma, as well as their financial relation with the Government of Burma itself. The present arrangements were made under the Government of Burma (Shan States Federal Fund) Order, 1940, and it was hoped that by the end of the present month sufficient information could have been got together and reviewed to make it possible to set up a permanent scheme for the relationship of the Shan States to the Government of Burma. But owing to the war it has not been possible to make that exhaustive review or deduce the necessary consequences from it, and consequently the Governor, in entire agreement with his Financial Adviser and the Finance Minister of the Burma Government, asks that this present arrangement should be continued for another two years. I hope that in view of the straightforward character of the proposal, the House may grant it now.

Mr. Sorensen (Leyton, West): May I ask whether the Burmese Legislature was consulted in this matter, or is likely to be consulted? Can the right hon. Gentleman say when the pending report, which has been so long delayed, is likely to be made?

Mr. Amery: I am advised that the Minister in charge of finance in the Burmese Ministry has entirely approved this temporary prolongation. It is not possible to say when the whole report will be available, but obviously the Governor hopes it will be available in the course of the next two years.

Question put, and agreed to.

To be presented by Privy Councillors or Members of His Majesty's Household.

AUDIT AND ACCOUNTS ORDER.

Mr. Amery: I beg to move,

"That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty in pursuance of the provisions of Section 157 of the Government of Burma Act, 1935, praying that the Government of Burma (Audit and Accounts) Order, 1942, be made in the form of the draft laid before Parliament."

According to the Government of Burma Audit and Accounts Order, 1936, the Auditor-General has to retire at the age of 55, or on the completion of five years' service. The period of the present Auditor-General's office terminates at the end of this month, but, in view of the very great increase of expenditure and the many difficult and complicated questions arising out of the fact that war has actually been waged in Burma, the Governor is anxious—and I am in entire agreement—that the term of the present Auditor-General's office should be prolonged during the present emergency. This Order empowers the Governor, in his discretion, to extend the tenure of the present incumbent for such further period as may seem expedient.

Question put, and agreed to.

To be presented by Privy Councillors or Members of His Majesty's Household.

ORDERS OF THE DAY.

SUGAR INDUSTRY (*re-committed*) BILL.

Considered in Committee; reported, without Amendment; read the Third time, and passed.

EX-SERVICE MEN (BADGE).

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That this House do now adjourn."—[*Major Sir James Edmondson.*]

Mr. Bellenger (Bassetlaw): I wish briefly to refer to a matter of which I have

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Bellenger.]

given previous notice. It concerns the issuing of some sort of badge to those men of the Fighting Services and the Merchant Navy who have been discharged because of ill-health, or perhaps wounds, and have not been able to establish their right to pensions. The House may remember that, nearly a month ago, I brought forward the case of a man who served overseas, went through Dunkirk, and was then discharged from the Service, but who was not able to establish his right to a pension owing to his disability not being due to war service or aggravated by it. This man received a present of some white feathers from some ill-natured person, and naturally, he was very much grieved by this. When one considers the circumstances in which these men live, such incidents often have—and I believe had in this case—a detrimental effect upon their health or at any rate upon their business circumstances. Another hon. Member supported the case that I made, and the Press have taken up the question generally in relation to the white feather episode. I do not want to stress that aspect of the matter too much, because, I am pleased to say, the white feather business is not overdone in this war as it was in the last war.

I bring forward the case on general grounds, because it affects a large number of men who have been discharged from the Services because they are unfit, and the Army, Navy and Air Force have no further use for their services. When war was declared, many of these men, in the heat of the moment, volunteered their services. It is possible that many of them were not fit at the time, but nevertheless, owing to the low medical standard adopted in those days, the medical officers passed these men into the Services, and therefore, it cannot be denied that the Services have had the use of these men for varying periods. In the particular case which I raised, and in many other cases, the men have gone overseas and have fought their country's battles. I do not want to make a sentimental matter of this, but I suggest to the House that some slight recognition ought to be given to these men. It is not much that I am asking. I would remind the House that if discharged ex-Service men are able first of all to pass through the fine mesh of the Ministry of Pensions' sieve and obtain a pension, they are automatically entitled to a discharged Service man's badge; but as we know, the Ministry of Pensions reject a large number of cases because, they say, the disability was not incurred or aggravated by reason of service during this war. I want to ask my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who is to reply, whether it is not true that the decision as to the issue of badges was arrived at, before the war, by an Honours Committee and whether that procedure of not granting these badges, or granting them in certain limited categories is being followed. I put that point because questions to the Service Departments and the Ministry of Pensions have brought me the reply that they can do nothing about the matter, and therefore, I am led to believe that it is within the province of the Prime Minister to settle the matter. I hope the Prime Minister's representative here to-day will be able to give some sort of answer which will remove this disability from this deserving body of men.

I should like to say a few words concerning whether a badge is necessary or not. The late Secretary of State for War dismissed my Question quite casually, saying that he did not think a badge was necessary, because nowadays everybody is more or less subject to some form of national service. That is not the point. This patriotic body of men, and perhaps women, would like to feel that there is some small recognition of the services they have given to the State. Is it too much to ask the Government to give them that slight recognition at a time when badges are issued to all sorts of people? I have noticed that Members of the House who serve in the Home Guards go about with little badges in their buttonholes. It may be that they have purchased these badges themselves, but I presume it is quite in order for them to wear the badges; they like to show that they are members of the Home Guard, and perhaps the badge is some sort of alibi in case somebody wants to present them with white feathers. Those people who serve on the railways are all badged as railway workers, merely because they are in reserved occupations. I do not know who pays for those badges; it may be the railway companies in their generosity, it may be at the expense of the stockholders. I believe that in the case of members of the Home Guard, they are proud to wear the badges. I do not know whether any discharge certificate is given to men

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

who are discharged from the Services, but if so, it is obvious that they cannot carry such certificates about in their buttonholes.

I ask my right hon. Friend to give sympathetic consideration to this matter. I do not wish to develop the matter at any great length, as there are other hon. Members who wish to raise matters on the Motion for the Adjournment, and I will conclude by quoting from a letter which I have received from a man who was formally a regular soldier. It is true that some of the men whom I have in mind have served only for a brief period during the war. The case which I want to quote now, however, is of a man who was a regular soldier. He served for nearly 16 years in the Regular Army and on the Reserve, and he retired with an exemplary character. He writes that the Ministry said his disability was not aggravated by war services, and I presume that there the matter ends as far as his claim for a pension is concerned; but he asks that at any rate he should be granted a small reward in the form of some sort of badge which he could show proudly among his associates in various places where associates meet. He wants to display some mark of his service before the war and during the war.

That is my case. I hope my right hon. Friend will be able to say something which, if it does not go all the way to meeting the case, will partly meet it. It may seem to the House that this matter is a trivial one, but it is the small things which count in life. Somebody may say a word or do something that will create pages and pages of print in the newspapers or cause despondency and dissatisfaction. If we can do anything to remove a certain amount of discontent which is evident among these discharged soldiers, sailors, airmen and members of the Merchant Navy, I think we ought to do it. It is something that would not cost much in money. In our childhood days we learned that civility costs nothing. This would be more than civility. It would be a recognition by the State that a man has done his duty to his country in his country's hour of need. I hope my right hon. Friend may be able to give a satisfactory answer.

Colonel Arthur Evans (Cardiff, South): Quite briefly, I should like to sustain the argument which has been submitted to my right hon. Friend and the House. I have examined the Questions and Answers on this subject, and they have failed to convince me, for the reasons which have been submitted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Bellenger). In the city and in the country we see large numbers of people in civilian clothes wearing armlets or badges of some kind which have been issued by various Government Departments, denoting the kind of national service they are endeavouring to render to the nation in its hour of need, and it seems strange to me that the authorities have decided in the case of a man who came forward at the beginning of the war, in spite of certain physical disabilities, to offer his services, who was accepted, and nine times out of ten served overseas with distinction, who, through no fault of his own, has been subsequently discharged—that in such a case he should be denied the distinction he has earned, and of which he has every right to be proud. Those who served overseas in the early days of the last war were awarded the Mons Star, and others who served overseas were awarded the 1914-15 Star. I think the Mons Star ribbon was issued within nine months of the declaration of war, and the 1914-15 Star came out within a year.

Captain Cobb (Preston): There was no medal.

Colonel Evans: I think my hon. and gallant Friend has made a mistake, and on reflection he will recall that the red, white and blue Ribbon was issued to the troops nine months after August, 1914, and the 1914-15 Star within a year. I well remember the effect on the men wearing that new Ribbon. It had an encouraging effect on the morale of the troops—after all, it was nothing to be ashamed of. To-day we have many men serving in the Army at home and overseas who have nothing to show that they have been through France, Belgium, Greece and Crete, and I think there has been an undue economy in building up morale, or, if you please, bowing to the human desire for some kind of recognition among their fellows. It does not help to sustain the morale of the nation if the authorities take too narrow a view of an issue of this kind, and I trust the Government will reconsider their decision.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Mr. Burke (Burnley): I should like to support very briefly the argument which has been put forward. The borderline between the issue and the non-issue of a badge is very nebulous. Let me give an illustration. Correspondence has been taking place for six months with the Ministry of Pensions as to whether or not a man's injury was aggravated as a result of his war service. Finally, the Ministry decided to come down in the man's favour, which means that he will be entitled to a badge. It has always been touch and go which side the Ministry would take, and the man would have lost his entitlement if the decision had gone the other way. Many of the men are disgruntled about this matter, and I can assure the Minister there is a good deal of dissatisfaction about it. These men, many of whom went through the last war and were called up in 1939, feel they are entitled to a badge. Many of these men, because they had suffered so much in the last war, were not able to keep the pace in this war—many of them were at Dunkirk—and had to be discharged. They feel very strongly on the matter. They had a good deal to suffer in this war because of the duties they did in the last war, and they feel that their entitlement to a badge is something to which the Government ought to pay consideration.

I will give a further case to the House. A good deal of concern was caused in my constituency because of the unfortunate incident connected with it, which gave it much publicity. The man in question fought in the last war, and was passed A.1 for this war. He went through Dunkirk and had a terrible time, coming home a nervous wreck. I took up his case with the Ministry of Pensions, but they declined to recognise their responsibility. The man committed suicide, and the case got a good deal of publicity. As a result, when I took up the case again, the claim of the man was recognised, and his wife will now be entitled to some memento. I very much doubt whether his claim would have been recognised had he died under ordinary circumstances. It is because of the anomalies which arise from the line which has been drawn by the Ministry, that I think they should go the whole hog, instead of making entitlement dependent upon a Government Department's decision, which is often thought to be wrong, and causes a great deal of hardship, and against which there is no right of appeal. That decision should not also decide the entitlement of a man to some permanent recognition of his service. I hope the Minister will give the matter very serious and sympathetic consideration.

Major Milner (Leeds, South East): My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Bellenger) should be honoured by the fact that the Foreign Secretary has come to reply to him to-day. I think that we might have had one of the Service Ministers, or the Minister of Pensions, on the Front Bench, although I do not wish my right hon. Friend to think I am complaining in any way; there is no one who has a better record in these matters, and who will be more sympathetic to the claim put forward. Clearly, I think, there is a need for some recognition, although, of course, every man presumably obtains his discharge certificate, which gives evidence that, in fact, he has served for his period. I may be in error, but I do think my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for South Cardiff (Colonel Evans) is correct about the 1914 Star and the 1914-15 Medal. It is certainly the case that the Medals were issued at a later period, otherwise some of us would have been wearing them earlier. There is, I think, a case for some recognition, but as to which form it should take I am in some little doubt. It is difficult, I imagine, to draw the line. There is the man who volunteered in the first few days or weeks of the war, who, by reason of some injury suffered in the last war, was not accepted for His Majesty's Forces. I put myself in that category, because in the heat of the moment I endeavoured in the first week of the war to join the Royal Air Force but was not found medically fit. No doubt there are many cases of that sort. A most deserving case is that of a volunteer who suffered an injury in the war, but whose injury has not for technical reasons entitled him to receive a pension. Whether that is so or not, clearly there should be some recognition of that sort.

My only doubt is as to precisely where the line should be drawn. I do not feel competent, without more thought than I have been able to give it, to express an opinion on that, but I think that in

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

normal cases those who joined up or were conscripted or had commissions and suffered ill-health during their service, possibly due to the service, should receive some acknowledgment. Throughout the war we have perhaps been lacking in a number of respects of this sort. I have often felt recently that many of us, myself included, perhaps may be a little to blame in a number of matters that we have preached about, the attacks that we have made upon the brass hats, and so on. The Army must be backed up, and we must show our confidence in it. I have no doubt that when the time and the opportunity come the present Army is as good as, and possibly better than, any that has gone before it. We have boosted the Air Force and the Navy, and we have rather neglected the Army, and I feel that at the first opportunity we ought to ensure that the Army should have its tail up as much as the other Armed Forces, and this matter would help to some small extent in that direction. I hope the right hon. Gentleman may be able to give a favourably reply to the request.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Mr. Eden): I have listened with a very considerable measure of sympathy to the case which has been so well put and so ably supported. It seems to me just one of those subjects which the House should discuss, as it affects a great number of people and it is a subject on which we should try to arrive at a just conclusion. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Bellenger) asked how the decision as to this King's Badge and the entitlement to it was come to. The examination was originally referred to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals in Time of War, a Standing Committee which advises the War Office and other Service Departments on these things. On it were representatives of all the Departments primarily concerned. That Committee, after very full consideration, reported unanimously in favour of the introduction of the Badge and also recommended what rules should be adopted. That representation was in its turn examined by the War Cabinet, which found in favour of instituting the Badge. They also looked into the definition of qualifications and decided to adopt it.

Mr. Bellenger: When was that?

Mr. Eden: I cannot give the exact date.

Mr. Bellenger: Was it before the war?

Mr. Eden: I feel pretty certain, from my own recollection, that it was since the war. The scheme was submitted to the King and had His Majesty's approval. The hon. and gallant Gentleman the Member for South East Leeds (Major Milner) seemed to put his finger on the difficulty, which is where to draw the line. The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Burke) spoke of the line as being nebulous. I do not know whether a line can be nebulous, but it is certainly wavy, and it is very difficult to draw it straight. Wherever you draw it, there are bound to be hardship cases on either side. My own feeling is that I should be very reluctant to ask my colleagues to widen the terms of reference for this particular Badge. It is very desirable that it should be highly valued by those who get it. That means that you must not widen your scope too much. I often thought that the trouble about the last war with practically all the decorations was that as the causes for which they could be given were widened they became of less and less value. I felt perhaps that the ordinary private soldier would have preferred a decoration for six months' service in the line. For these reasons and others I should be very reluctant to ask my colleagues to increase the number of those who will become entitled to this actual Badge. But what has been said to-day makes me feel that there is a case for further examination as to whether some other badge might not be made available for those who fall on the wrong side of the line in respect of the King's Badge. That is a matter which should have further examination, and I am prepared to take the matter up and see whether something of that kind can be done—to have it investigated and to report to the House again upon the decision that we may arrive at. I think on the whole that is the fairest procedure, and I hope it will commend itself to the House.

Mr. Bellenger: I appreciate very much the right hon. Gentleman's answer, and I hope he will make the investigation.

MERCANTILE MARINE.

Petty-Officer A. P. Herbert (Oxford University): I hope it will not be neces-

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Petty-Officer Herbert.]

sary to apologise for raising in Debate in this House the subject of the officers and men, or as they are now called the " sea-going personnel," of the Mercantile Marine, though I also hope I shall not fall too much into the error into which many of us fall of talking about shipping in one compartment and officers and men in another, as if neither had very much to do with the other. I shall readily apologise for my obvious incapacity to deal with so large and important a subject, though I am somewhat fortified by the recollection that, although I am a mere University Member and ought not perhaps to speak of these things, another mere University Member, the Junior Burgess of Oxford University (Sir A. Salter), is the Parliamentary Secretary for Shipping, and, I believe, is doing very distinguished work in that capacity, in my humbler capacity I do see something of shipping and seamen. But I thought it would be right for the House, even in the informal circumstances of an Adjournment Motion, to try and send some message of good will, good hope, of boundless admiration and endless gratitude to the gallant officers and men who are carrying the Red Ensign through all the waters of the world, and through all the dangers that devils can devise. I think it necessary also to say that it is not perhaps wholly impertinent of this House to interest itself in their affairs. I had to say that, because some extraordinary observations have fallen from certain citizens outside who recently deprecated this House going even so far as to debate the affairs of the Mercantile Marine. It seems to me to be an entirely new and deplorable constitutional doctrine that members of any industry, however worthy, should endeavour to dictate to this House what subjects we should discuss and what subjects we should not discuss, especially if that industry has in the past often come to Parliament for assistance and without doubt, and rightly, will come again.

First, may I give a brief sketch of recent events in this affair? A little more than six months ago Lord Marchwood, better known to most of us as our familiar and genial friend Sir George Penny, raised the question in another place whether the Government would appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into the affairs of the Mercantile Marine. On the same day I had the honour to put on the Paper of this House a Motion in similar, but different terms, asking for a Royal Commission to inquire into the future of the Mercantile Marine. I had the honour to have then the support of 100 Members of this House. I have not the faintest idea what their position is now, and I am not committing them in any way. I have not in my miscellaneous life been able to do any canvassing or organising or anything of that sort. Well, some rather curious results followed. There was a great deal of not merely unfriendly comment but of abusive comment from shipowners, from the Seamen's Union, and from the National Maritime Board, in which both these bodies are joined together. The National Maritime Board, in what appeared to me to be an extremely wrong-headed and petulant announcement, said among other things that the idea of a Royal Commission was hopelessly out-of-date and obsolete, that the seamen did not want it, and that expert opinion would not like to be set aside by amateurs, however well-meaning. There was also some suggestion from a shipowner about persons seeking political self-advancement. None of these terms would be applicable to Lord Marchwood, who is a master mariner and a very unself-seeking patriot.

On the other hand, Lord Marchwood and I received, and I imagine many Members received, a surprising torrent of letters from seamen and officers actually on the seas or just back from the seas, putting a very different complexion on the whole proposition. These letters were far from suggesting, as the National Maritime Board did, that there should be " a truce to suggestions which, however well-intentioned, inevitably caused doubts and apprehensions in the minds of merchant seamen." I have brought here only a very small collection from a great pile of letters from seamen; signed by their own hands, not by one seaman, but by entire crews. I do not want to make too much of this, and I am not going to throw about a lot of easy accusations, but I must quote some of the letters, because I want, for the purpose of the argument I shall develop later, to counter the suggestion that either the National Maritime Board or the representatives of the Seamen's Union are entitled to say at almost a moment's notice that on any particular subject the seamen dislike this or liked that. Here is a letter signed by several men, from able-

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

bodied seamen, donkeymen, greasers down to deckboys, saying:

"We wonder in view of the recent regulations, etc., if any definite steps will be taken to improve the vile living aboard the average tramp. Life, in so far as food and accommodation go, is almost intolerable, and far below the standard of the maritime boards of other nations."

ROYAL ASSENT.

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners.

The House went; and, having returned—

Mr. SPEAKER *reported the Royal Assent to*:

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

MERCANTILE MARINE.

Question again proposed, "That this House do now adjourn."

Petty-Officer Herbert: It has been long a boast of mine that I could stop the swiftest horse in the Derby or any other race simply by putting a half-crown on it; and I am now persuaded by sound experience that I have only to make one of my rare interventions in the proceedings of this House in order to cause a sense of urgency in the legislative body at the other end of the passage. But here we are again, and the interval has at least given the Parliamentary Secretary the opportunity to get away from the pressing business which I know unavoidably detained him; and I should like to congratulate him on his arrival in this office, because I think this is his first public appearance in debate. For his benefit, I was trying to give a sketch of what happened recently in connection with the unavailing attempt by Lord Marchwood and me to get a Royal Commission and of the abuse which descended upon us from the National Maritime Board and others. Then I proposed to read a few letters from seamen at sea showing that they by no means take the same view, that it would be absurd to have a Royal Commission. I had started to read one complaining of the food and accommodation on ships. It goes on:

"We all realise the seriousness of the present situation in the Atlantic and the necessity of turning ships about quickly."

and finishes with a reference to:

"ships that are eye-sores to the oceans of the world and a constant reproach to the flag they sail under."

I have quoted the phrase "We all realise the seriousness of the present situation," because I am greatly struck by the quality of these letters. They are not the letters of sea-lawyers, not the letters of natural moaners or whiners, but the letters of men who realise that they have a job and must do it but who also ask us to do our part. Here is a letter from a second mate:

"I am writing to tell you that such an inquiry would be welcomed by merchant seamen. The boards, bodies and unions who are supposed to understand and look after the welfare of merchant seamen have not made any sort of job of it. . . . On my ship we stare like cannibals at a gramophone when we see the real wash-basins on some of the trawlers recently taken over by the Navy. On board when we want to wash we have to go down to the stokehold with a bucket for water."

That letter comes from an officer. The next letter has many signatures of A.Bs., greasers, donkeymen, firemen and deckboys and says:

"Regarding the proposed Royal Commission on the Merchant Service, may we suggest you go ahead with it."

A man who is a master mariner writes:

"The statement that the men do not want an inquiry is astounding and entirely lacking in foundation when the men have never been consulted. The very fact that they made such a statement without an appeal to the seamen shows clearly that their concern was only for themselves."

I do not subscribe to all these statements. Some of these views may be extravagant. Another letter says:

"I am disappointed at the attitude of the national union officials denying the seamen the right to think for themselves. The union has absolutely nothing to do with the majority of sea-going men. We are never consulted on any matter concerning our lives."

The next letter says:

"We want a proper uniform. This is definite. Don't believe the National Union of Seamen. They don't want a uniform."

I could go on for hours reading these letters, but I wish to make these one or two points. First, I claim for myself that, with my customary restraint and Christian feeling, I did not yield to the temptation to send all these letters to the Press when Lord Marchwood and I were so much abused. The second point is that because the National Union of Seamen and the National Maritime Board, who, I know,

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Petty-Officer Herbert.]

are doing great work, say this, that and the other, we must not agree that it is necessarily the opinion of the seamen.

I tried hard to get a Debate in this House, and it was not the fault of the Chief Whip that I could not, because I know that he did his best, but for one reason or another it was not possible. On 3rd February Lord Marchwood returned to the charge in the House of Lords again, and there Lord Leathers again declined to open any sort of inquiry. In doing so, he used words which were very warm in expression, and I am sure were warmly felt, about the interest which he had always had in the Merchant Navy. He went a little farther than that, but I will quote what he said later.

So it might seem at first that Lord Marchwood's campaign had not borne much fruit, but that would not be quite correct. Everbody concerned owes a great debt to Lord Marchwood for his public spirit and bold endeavour. I know enough of the working of the machinery of Government to be aware that, very often, when a Minister is repelling with obstinacy, and even with worse, the efforts of a pertinacious critic, he is often secretly pleased, because the criticism will help to stimulate those behind the scenes. He is, in other words, using the bark of the wolf to stimulate the sheep-dog. I think something of that sort has happened here. I see that some important and useful little reforms have been announced, although I do not know whether they were begun, since Lord Marchwood's efforts.

Anyhow, since the war began, a great many useful things have been done, such as the pool system, continuity of employment, or at least of pay, increased rates of pay—not too high even now—free railway passes, compensation for lost gear, and that kind of thing. That is but part of the list which I think the Minister had better give us, because he knows more about it than I do. There are also better safety arrangements. In the new ships there is a great improvement in comfort and quarters. It is not my purpose to throw stones at anyone who is engaged on working at this most important building, and I am sure that if anybody is going to improve things, the new Parliamentary Secretary will make a very good job of it, though I would by no means belittle the good work of his predecessor, the right hon. and gallant Member for Uxbridge (Colonel Llewellin).

About the future: I should like to say at once that I am what might be called a "better worlder." I believe in a better world, and I hope for it; but I hoped for a better world before the war. I see no reason why the existence of a destructive war in both hemispheres should necessarily make it easier to improve the world thereafter, and I have no patience whatever with those who spread abroad the insidious doctrine that no citizen can put his heart into the war unless he is promised not merely a blueprint of Utopia, but something on account at once. I am sure that no seaman would subscribe to such an anaemic doctrine. But that does not absolve us from our responsibility. Not as a matter of sentiment, charity, politics or morale, but as a matter of justice, security and economic efficiency, we must do all that we can to prevent happening after this war what happened after the last war. Then, as we all know, merchant captains were going about the streets selling envelopes and albums at the doors, and ships' crews were manned entirely by master mariners because a place before the mast was the only place of which they could find at sea, but all the time our ships were being sold to alien flags all over the world.

As to the future, what did Lord Leathers say? He said two main things. The first was that after the war the Government, in the light of conditions then prevailing, would be able to give a definite answer—he did not really say "after the war," as I prefer to say, but, "on the cessation of hostilities"—the Government would be able to say whether or not there should be an inquiry into the wider aspects of the Merchant Navy. Secondly, he said that he had asked the National Maritime Board to study certain questions, such as continuity of employment after the war, and improved methods of entry and training of "sea-going personnel" and that he would ask them to bring these problems, among others, to the stage of definite proposals—as soon as possible. The main question I want to put to the Minister is whether this House, whatever may have been the somewhat tepid applause of their Lordships in another place, is satisfied that that is enough. So far as I know, I may be the only person

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

in the world who thinks so, but I must say frankly that I am not. I hope, as briefly as possible, to give my reasons.

First of all, perhaps I may try to sketch the kind of subject of inquiry and the objects of reform which we have in mind. The best and shortest sketch has been made by 40 young seamen who happened to be in London during an examination, and who wrote a letter to " The Times." I may say that they got into great trouble for doing so. The letter set out the proposals as follows:

" (1) That the terms of employment should be laid down by the Government and that the employment should be continuous;

(2) That the entry should be controlled and the methods of training uniform throughout the Merchant Navy and subject at all times to Government supervision;

(3) That an officially recognised uniform should be granted and the status of the Merchant Navy be raised to an equivalent of that of any other national service."

What exactly they mean by that I do not know, and I am not sure that they know themselves.

" (4) That living conditions on board should be uniform throughout the Service and all seamen should be entitled to the same standard of food and accommodation irrespective of the company under which they are serving.

(5) That all seamen should have a regular rate of promotion and that there should be a set retiring age, with a pension for all ranks and ratings, subject, of course, to good conduct and general discipline. We suggest also that living conditions on all ships should be brought up to those found in the better class of British merchant ships. These proposals are the views of some 40 active merchant seamen, assembled on 19th September in this club."

I myself have ventured to describe these objects as the " Five E's "—Entry, Education, Employment, Equipment and Exit. May I say a few words about each? As to entry and education, I am told that one grievance is that many firms are now employing far more apprentices than are ever likely to be absorbed as officers, with the result that while they are good, cheap labour, the parents of these apprentices in many cases have no hope of seeing them emerge as officers. As to education, there is a great variety in the degree of training both of officers and seamen. All officers, of course, have to pass the same examination, though they do not all go through similar schools, but as regards seamen the captain has no knowledge or guarantee in his own mind before he sails as to what they know and what they do not know. I have certainly seen some remarkable things on the river during this war, when men have come to our service, calling themselves deep-sea fishermen, sometimes, who have been in the Merchant Service. I have found that they have been unable to swim, that they are unable to handle a boat in a tideway, and have never before steered a vessel of any kind. One officer told me the other day that on one occasion, leaving a wharf in the Pool of London, he found that not one member of his crew had ever steered a ship before or was able to do so. A certain modicum of training, even in these difficult times, when we are, no doubt, glad of anyone who will go to sea would not seem to be a bad thing.

The third " E " is employment. Is the employment of officers and men after the war to be casual, as it was before, or continuous, as it is now? If it is to be continuous, how is it to be arranged and who is to pay for it? There is another question which those who ask for continuous employment must face. Even seamen perhaps have to face the choice between the regularity of a civil servant on the one hand and the spacious ease, freedom and independence of the Stock Exchange on the other. In other words, may not those who require continuous employment be required in turn to face an obligation for training and discipline? I do not know, but it is one of the questions which will have to be discussed.

Fourthly, there is the question of equipment, such things as quarters, comfort and so forth, about which I think the Minister will have something to say later. On the question of equipment, may I say a few words on a subject on which a good deal of foolish talk has recently been used, and that is the question of uniforms? Two gallant officers in another place mentioned casually, as one of the curious things distinguishing the Merchant Navy from almost anybody else these days, that they have no uniform, except, of course, the officers and apprentices. At once people leapt upon this remark and said that it was desired to " navify " the Mercantile Marine, to regiment them and all the rest of it. It is really very unfair to Lord Chatfield and others. I am not going to say exactly what it is that seamen want, although I have a good deal of evidence

Archivo Histórico — Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

[Petty-Officer Herbert.]

in these letters that they would like uniforms. But let us discuss the matter; do not let us jump down each other's throats because someone makes a casual remark.

After all, there are practical advantages in uniforms, or we should not see so many of them about. They are a working dress, saving the private clothes, as a rule provided free—although it is one of the complaints on the part of officers that their uniforms are not provided free—and in war-time, after all, a wandering sailor can find many substantial advantages in a uniform. I get dozens of letters pointing out that when our seamen go to a foreign port, while the naval gunner who goes ashore gets free bus rides, cinemas, canteens and so on, they have to go ashore in their own clothes and do not receive as much attention—sometimes, indeed, they are arrested on suspicion. So there are points in favour of uniforms. Apart from that, they form a great element, almost a spiritual ingredient, in that vague thing we call status. You have only to look about you to realise that the uniform is much more than a badge of servitude. It is a symbol of authority and a title to respect; and though it may be illogical and wrong, it is a fact that people in uniform are much better treated than people who are not. As one who passed without any volition on my part from the civilian force at the beginning of the war to my present uniform, of which I am proud, I do know a little of what I am talking about.

Lastly comes exit, that is to say, the retiring age, pensions and so forth. The pension situation seems to me to be wrapt in mystery. An ordinary seaman, I know, gets the same pension as the industrial worker, and there is some mysterious pensions fund as well, but I only want to raise this special point about pensions. There is an officers' pensions fund which I know has recently come into being as a result of some very splendid endeavours by all concerned, and there is a war risks Government pensions scheme. I gather that it is only for war risks. This curious point arises, and I have heard complaints about it everywhere. If I, for example, a humble unit on the fringe of the Navy, am bombed or mined and perish, or if I slip off a slippery deck into the water and drown, or even if I walk off a pier into the river and drown, in every case—I was going to say I only get what I deserve, but my wife will get the same pension, because I am in the Navy.

But take the captain of a ship, and I am sure the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, who goes out in a convoy and is bombed or mined and perishes. That is a war risk and his wife will get a pension. But if, in the same convoy and through no fault of his, there is a collision with another ship and the other ship is in error, that is only a marine risk, and he gets nothing. I know that that is the result of a legal judgment which cannot be questioned in the courts, but I do ask the Minister whether it is not the kind of thing which can be done by a stroke of the pen by the Government, because nothing would better bring the status of the Mercantile Marine up to the status of the Navy than to put them on the same footing. I hope that if he has time, the Minister will deal with that.

Now, why do I say that the National Maritime Board is not the body to be entrusted to prepare proposals for the future? I will not press my own prejudices against the National Maritime Board, which, I am bound to say, are chiefly drawn from the internal evidence of their pronouncements, nor will I rest entirely upon the known prejudices of the seamen, but there it is. It is quite obvious from my correspondence that this body has not got the confidence of the seamen, or indeed of the officers. That is easy to understand. It may be unjust, and I am not going to throw stones; they have done a very good work on behalf of a very fine industry, but we have to confess, and indeed it is common knowledge among seafaring men, that the mortality among shipowners through tuberculosis and malnutrition is not exceptionally high: and they do comment upon that fact. On the other hand, they do comment on the fact that the Seamen's Union subscription does not seem to be giving them very much. There it is. They have not got much faith in this Board, and if you are relying upon any effect on morale of what you do, that is a thing to be considered.

Far more important than that is the fact that the National Maritime Board, in its essence, appears to be the wrong body to do this job. It is a conciliatory

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

body confined to two interests, shipowners and Seamen's Union representatives. Never is there represented there the third great party in these affairs, the State. Take any question. If we decide that any benefit is to be bestowed upon seamen and officers, it has to be provided either by the State or by the shipowners—almost certainly, I think, the State. Therefore the State should be at these deliberations. If any new obligation, training or discipline is required of the seamen, it must be imposed presumably, by the State, by legislation. Therefore, the State should be present at these deliberations. Take continuity of employment, which has been referred to the National Maritime Board. Who is to provide that? Presumably the State. Yet the National Maritime Board are to discuss this question by themselves. The same applies to other matters. All these questions must involve either the State being asked to assist or the State wishing to assert itself. Yet the State is not represented there. Beyond that are all sorts of large questions very much in the background which ought to be brought into the foreground. How are you to give the service a national status, whatever that means? Can you do that without, at the same time, nationalising shipping? Can you, as one seaman suggests to me, leave the ships to the owners and let the men be run by the Government? I am not suggesting any opinions on these questions, but somebody ought to consider them.

I think that the time has now come when a really strong body, with an impartial, able chairman, should be set up to go into all these questions calmly, without heated debate, and without the urgency which will arise after the war, now, when the spirit of war is in us and before the spirit of gratitude has died. One power I would give to that new body, the power to say that the next seaman who lands at Hull, the next captain who lands in Liverpool, the next engineer who lands in London, shall come and tell them what he thinks, so that we may make sure whether these boards, unions and protected bodies are standing between the seamen and the nation or not.

I apologise for having taken so long, but it is a fairly large subject. I hope that I have not suggested in any way that seamen to-day are a soft and namby-pamby body less worthy than their fathers, because I should be doing a very ill service to them if I did. We all know that it is not true. We know there is some bug in our blood which will always send our men to sea, however great the dangers, however bad the conditions. But that, as I have said, does not absolve us from our responsibilities.

It has been my privilege during this war to see from time to time, at the other end of this great river, the convoys coming home, ships of all sorts and sizes. Their paint is battered, and they have wounds in their sides sometimes; they have come through every imaginable danger, but their flags are flying, and no man can look at them without a lift of the heart. But they go by as strange and silent, I often think, as ghosts. I think, " How little we know about the lives of those men." The seamen look over the side with that remote, sardonic look which they reserve for all miserable mortals who are not sailing in their own particular ship. They seem to say to me, " You will never know anything about us, and you will never really do anything for us. We are the pets of all the world to-day. To-morrow you will forget us, as you did last time." I hope that will not be true, and I believe that it will not be true. But I am sure it is true that we do not know nearly enough about these men. We know more, I think, about the lives of the men in the pits than about the men, and the lives of the men, in the ships. They have no factory meetings, no mass meetings; they do not write to " The Times." We have inspected, all of us, many a fine factory, many a fine workshop and many a fine farm, but which of us has ever inspected the forecastle quarters in a tramp steamer? Very few of us, I think. But, when they do speak to us, these silent men, in letters like those I have here, and in the sorry episodes such as we have read about in the papers, it is our duty to find out now, and act if we can.

I wonder what those men whom I saw yesterday, who to-morrow will be in their homes or in sailors' homes, will say when they read that the great Lord Leathers, himself the former head of a great shipping firm, has said in the House of Lords, after all the talk, that there may or may not be an inquiry into their future after the war, but that now their old friends the shipowners and their old friends the Seamen's Union are to go into these matters in secret deliberation. I do not think these

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Petty-Officer Herbert.]

men will throw up their hats and stand each other drinks about that. Nor do I think that they will make a moan and shy away from their duty. I think that they will laugh a little, shrug their shoulders a little and, God bless them, go back to sea again. But we who remain behind, filling our bellies as often as we do, and who have the honour to represent them as we represent all the citizens of this realm, we have our duties too. I think that we are in the dark and ought to look for light.

Mr. Shinwell (Seaham): My hon. and gallant Friend has quite properly stated that this is a large subject. Because it is I would have preferred, and no doubt he would agree with me in this, that we should have had the opportunity of discussing this important matter in no narrow and limited sense but on the broadest possible lines. For example, it is quite impossible to consider the future of the officers and men of the Mercantile Marine without considering at the same time the re-organisation of the Mercantile Marine itself. Some day we may require to ask the Government to afford facilities for a full-dress Debate on these lines. Whatever may be thought about my hon. and gallant Friend's prime objective, the setting up of a Royal Commission to examine this question of the conditions of the officers and men of the Mercantile Marine, we are grateful to him for having made reference to the conditions under which they labour. I feel that I express the views of all hon. Members present and of the men themselves when I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for his magnificent tribute to the galantry and valour of these men. They have performed a wonderful service to the nation. Of their valour we cannot speak too highly; but let me tell hon. Members—and I have some experience of these officers and seamen—that they are less concerned about eloquent orations on what they do in their everyday avocation than they are about the fundamental conditions which govern their lives. I have not the least doubt that if you approached a seaman in the East India Dock Road, or in Bute Road, Cardiff, or in the Broomielaw, Glasgow, and told him that you had made the remarkable discovery that he was a wonderful fellow, he would wonder what you were talking about.

What is my hon. and gallant Friend asking? Like Lord Marchwood, in another place, he asks for the setting up of a Royal Commission to conduct an investigation into the conditions in the Mercantile Marine, with a view to their improvement. What are the complaints among the men of the Mercantile Marine? They relate to food scales; crews' quarters; the training of seamen; manning, on deck and below; the long hours for which the men in the catering department labour; and matters of that sort. Not one of those questions requires the setting up of a Royal Commission. Every one can be dealt with by Amendments to the Merchant Shipping Acts; and the Government could to-morrow, or on some convenient date, come to the House with Amendments to those Acts, and correct the alleged abuses in the Mercantile Marine. Therefore, so far as ordinary complaints and the suggested improvements are concerned, there is no need for a Royal Commission. Moreover, my hon. and gallant Friend has, quite properly, referred to certain allegations for which the men are responsible, relating to their conditions and their treatment during the war. For example, he has referred to war risks and inadequate compensation. That is a serious grievance among the men. But surely he will not maintain that these matters can be disposed of by the setting up of a Royal Commission in order to deal with the future of the Mercantile Marine. Something must be done now. It is no use talking of a better world for seamen when the war is over. We had better have a few examples right here and now. That would satisfy the men much more than talk of a Royal Commission.

Undoubtedly, there has been considerable improvement in the conditions of the Mercantile Marine during the war. It is a remarkable and significant fact that you can always secure in war-time substantial improvements which are refused in peace-time. Before the war, when demands were made in this House for a substantial improvement—and it was then necessary—in crews' quarters, we were told that the conditions were, on the whole, very satisfactory, and that, at any rate, the shipowners were doing their best. Not even the Government were prepared to respond to the claims of the men, as regards crews' quarters, at any rate. But when the war came, everybody was

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

rushing around trying to secure improvements for the men in that connection. Undoubtedly there have been many improvements in accommodation, not only in new vessels but in the older types, where reconstruction has taken place. It is very disconcerting. One wonders why it is possible to secure improvements in time of war which are refused to these men in time of peace. It is not certain even that, at the end of this war, in spite of the manifestations of good will and the desire of everybody to do the best for officers and men in the Mercantile Marine, conditions will be improved. It depends upon circumstances. It depends upon whether the Mercantile Marine can pay its way. It depends, to a large extent, upon whether the Government of the day are prepared to pay subventions. It depends, to a large extent on the state of our commerce, on our capacity to expand international trade, and on the cost of building ships. All these are very serious issues. It is not merely a matter of good will. You have to discuss these questions in terms of stark, naked realism. I hope that we shall do it. But it does not require a Royal Commission. It can be done, to some extent, through the ordinary channels employed by the seamen, through the negotiating machinery; but not altogether. It must be left to this House to consider. It must be left, to a large extent, to public opinion.

I go some way with my hon. Friend when he says that we cannot leave all these matters to the National Maritime Board.The Board has a specific function, to deal with questions of wages and hours of labour and general conditions in the Mercantile Marine. There are seamen on one side; owners on the other. That is a very satisfactory machinery, particularly for the purpose of settling disputes. It is very necessary in time of war; but I would not suggest for a moment—I profoundly disagree with those who do make the suggestion—that the National Maritime Board can be allowed to dispose of these matters. If Lord Leathers has at any time made that statement—and perhaps we shall hear something from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary on that matter—and has suggested at any time that the Government cannot set up a Royal Commission or undertake a Governmental inquiry because these matters must be left to the National Maritime Board, I profoundly disagree.

Petty-Officer Herbert: Is it in order for me, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, to read an extract from the Minister's statement in another place?

Mr. Shinwell: I accept the hon. and gallant Member's word for what he said.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Sir Dennis Herbert): Only if it is a statement on behalf of the Government, and nothing more.

Petty-Officer Herbert: Having said that after the war the Government would be in a position to give a definite decision as to the possibility of an inquiry covering the wider aspects of the whole future of our Merchant Navy, the Noble Lord said:

> " The Government will plan in advance to meet that continuity of employment, improvements of methods and the nature and training of sea-going personnel and matters in regard to which, among others, I have been in communication with the National Maritime Board. I have begged them to give immediate consideration to these problems and bring them to the stage of definite proposals as soon as possible."

It looks as though he has really been to the Board.

Mr. Shinwell: I agree that that is an interpretation of that statement, and, as I say, I profoundly disagree with it, and I will give my reasons.

The Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of War Transport (Mr. Noel-Baker): What my Noble Friend said was that the Government will plan in advance to meet these conditions, and he asked the National Maritime Board to put forward proposals.

Mr. Shinwell: That puts another construction on the matter, and that is exactly how I feel about it. I conceive the function of the National Maritime Board, which consists of representatives of both sides of the industry, to be to consider what possible improvements can be effected, and then to advise the Government to come to a definite decision themselves. You have to bear in mind that the powers of one side or the other may be weighted and you might get a very unfair decision. Therefore, their function, at any rate as far as the larger issues are concerned, must be purely advisory in character. It is for the Government to take the necessary action, but I am not prepared to abandon the rights of this

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Shinwell.]

House to express opinions and to advise the Government on these issues. We have always done so. That brings me to a point of considerable importance in relation to the demand made by my hon. and gallant Friend. He suggests that since the demand was made for the setting of up a Royal Commission some improvements have been effected, but he must not assume that they have been brought about because of the demand for a Royal Commission.

I will give one or two examples. On the question of the pool system and continuous employment, it may be a surprise to the hon. and gallant Member and other hon. Members to learn that away back in the year 1913, before the last war, I personally advocated continuous employment in the Mercantile Marine. In those days, and before the present war, men managed to secure employment on board ship and went away on long voyages, and when they returned they might be unemployed for many weeks or many months; there was no security of employment in the Mercantile Marine. In 1913 the proposal was advocated, and representations were made to the large shipowning companies on the subject, and among the shipowners who were responsible there were financial difficulties in the way, or so we were informed. During this war there has been established the principle of continuous employment, which is one of the most important reforms ever brought into the Mercantile Marine. If you have the advantage of continuous employment, you must accept responsibility and have to be on call whenever your services are required. There were many seamen who only agreed to work by ship. After they were paid off, and if they had a few pounds in their pockets, they liked to get away sometimes on the " razzle-dazzle."

We do not get so much of that sort of thing nowadays as we did 20 years ago, but still there are men who like to get away and enjoy themselves. You cannot blame the seaman who wants to enjoy himself after returning from a long bout with the ocean. Sometimes it happens that seamen come back under the influence of intoxicants and make themselves a bit of a nuisance, but you cannot even blame them for that. I remember that Captain Bourne, the author of many books on the lives of seamen, and the commander recently of one of the large liner companies, said to me many years ago that he could not understand how any seaman could join his ship sober. I agree with him, because when you consider the accommodation which is provided for the men, the wages they receive, the conditions under which they labour and the possibility of shipwreck or something worse you could not blame them for the condition into which they sometimes plunged themselves. But there has been an improvement undoubtedly and it is no use pretending otherwise. There are good shipowners and bad shipowners, and at the present time I believe that there are more good shipowners than bad shipowners, but there are some who make difficulties, and they are largely on financial grounds.

Let us see what we can do about this. There are certain reforms which the Government can bring into operation at once. The first thing to do is to see that no ship goes to sea with accommodation that is inadequate or unsatisfactory if it can be avoided. The question of accommodation should not be left in the hands of the shipowner. It is a matter for the State. That is the first thing that ought to be done. In spite of what I have said about substantial improvements on the score of accommodation, it is still true to say that the quarters of the crew on some vessels is wholly inadequate, verminous and unsatisfactory. You cannot blame the men for that, and putting the men into a uniform will not remedy it. I do not say much about food scales, because undoubtedly there has been an improvement there.

The other thing is to correct the defects in the compensation system. It is all wrong when a man goes to sea in war-time and his ship is attacked either by submarine or aircraft and goes down or is damaged, and he sustains losses in clothing which has cost him several pounds in excess of the amount which he receives from the Government by way of compensation. One can imagine the resentment of the men when they are placed in such an undignified condition. Men cannot go to sea without a fair amount of clothing, and the Government ought to look into that matter. There are several other questions that are now being disposed of by the National Maritime Board, but I want to say to my hon. and gallant Friend that, although he may not agree about the National Seamen's Union—and very

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

frequently I have disagreed with them myself, as many of my friends know—yet, at the same time, they do a good job of work. There may be some officers and men who are inclined to take independent action and are not prepared to leave this matter in the hands of the National Seamen's Union or the Officers' Union. Nevertheless these organisations are doing excellent work. If my hon. and gallant Friend cared to consult them occasionally, he would discover that these organisations are much more satisfactory than some people are inclined to think.

My last point is on the subject of uniform. It may be that some men want to be put into a uniform, but I am satisfied that the National Seamen's Union is representing the viewpoint of the majority of seamen in the Mercantile Marine when they say, "We do not want the men to be put into uniform." Why do they say that? It is, of course, very satisfactory if you receive a uniform and do not require to provide your own clothing. But let us consider the practical side of the question. Who is to provide the uniform—the shipowner, the man or the State? If the man is to be asked to provide a uniform and pay for it himself, we may as well stop talking about it at once. He would only laugh; even the man who has demanded a uniform would expect somebody else to provide it. If it is to be the shipowner, are we to understand that men are to be tied to the ship or give up the uniform, because that is absurd? You cannot tie men down to a particular ship, even under a continuous and improving system. Men want to leave a ship because they want a change or because they want to sail a different route. Some men like crossing the North Atlantic. I know of men who have crossed it for the last 40 or 50 years. Other men prefer the freight trade, and some prefer to go East. Some men like crossing the Atlantic in summer on a short voyage of three or four weeks' duration and in the winter prefer to go through the Indian Ocean or the Red Sea.

Therefore, you cannot tie men down to a ship, and the provision of uniform by an employer means that they would be tied. If the State is to provide the uniform, would that denote that the man are State servants? I do not raise any objection to that, providing you take over the whole Mercantile Marine and run it as a State concern. One day we may have to face up to that, although not for doctrinaire reasons. We will have to face up to a number of fundamental changes in industrial organisation, not because of doctrinaire reasons, but because of the force of events. Mr. Runciman pointed out at the recent meeting of the Chamber of Shipping, over which he presided, that although he said they would resist nationalisation and will have nothing to do with State interference in their affairs, it will be impossible for them to carry on unless they receive a large measure of financial assistance from the State. Now, a large measure of financial assistance from the State denotes some measure of State control. We must face up to these questions. That is why I said at the beginning that we cannot circumscribe this question; it is part of the new economy and social structure we envisage after the war for the new world, about which so many people speak so glibly but have so few ideas of a constructive character.

May I advise my hon. Friend on a matter on which I have some little knowledge, because I was associated with seamen for many years? May I also say, in passing, that I have been associated with two sections of workpeople in my time—seamen and miners, and they are the salt of the earth. I know how rough and uncouth seamen can be, but they are generous to a fault and delightful people with whom to work. Of course, they have black sheep among them. I have suffered at their hands, sometimes physically, but sometimes I have responded, and it has made me a little tough. Nevertheless, they are fine fellows, and when we think of their efforts on our behalf in this war we cannot help but raise our hats to them. We want to do the best we can for them, and my advice to my hon. and gallant Friend and the Government is to let us see what we can do for them now, not in some remote age, to make their conditions more tolerable and comfortable. Do not let us shelve the question by talking about a Royal Commission. Let us begin to plan for reorganisation of the Mercantile Marine, because the future of this nation as an economic factor depends largely upon the power of the Mercantile Marine. I have said these few disconnected words in a quite unprepared way. I was not aware

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Shinwell.]
that the hon. and gallant Gentleman intended to speak on this matter to-day. I understood it was to come later and, as I have said, some day we ought to have a full-dress Debate on this subject and table our ideas for the reorganisation of the Mercantile Marine. I hope that day will come soon.

Mr. Loftus (Lowestoft): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Seaham (Mr. Shinwell), I was not aware that my hon. and gallant—and, perhaps I should add, learned—Friend the Senior Burgess for Oxford University (Petty Officer Herbert) intended to raise this question to-day but his speech and the speech we have just listened to has prompted me to intervene in the Debate for a few moments. I listened with great interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Seaham, especially his concluding words, which paid a most generous tribute to seamen and miners. He said that they were the most generous people alive. As a class miners and seamen almost alone retain the aristocratic qualities, courage, generosity, recklessness, and an intense loyalty to their leaders. But I think the hon. Member for Seaham was a little inconsistent. He started, as it were, to criticise my hon. and gallant Friend and pointed out that improvements could be made by Government action right away in the conditions of service of the Mercantile Marine. He seemed to think that my hon. and gallant Friend's idea was to have a Royal Commission now to inquire into their conditions and make recommendations for their improvement.

I thoroughly agree with him. Of course, the Government can improve conditions now, and I hope they will do so. I do not tie myself to a Royal Commission, but I do support strongly the demand that now, during the war, we should have a very thorough inquiry into the whole future of our Mercantile Marine and, I would add, our fishing fleet and seamen generally, in order to ensure that they are in a better position and have greater security in the future than they have had so far in the past. It is a curious thing that to-day we are discussing merchant shipping and seamen, that yesterday we discussed agriculture and its future, and that the day before we discussed coalmining and its future. Between these three great industries there is a strong connection. They are not just ordinary industries; they are ways of life producing three characteristic types of men. The English national character was built by our countrymen and seamen. On successive days the House have discussed mining and agriculture, and on each occasion hon. Members have been concerned about their future and resolved to secure the future of these industries. So in this Debate, when we discuss the third great industry, this typically British industry which builds up the British type of men, as agriculture and mining do, we ought in a few words to express our opinion that we must here and now begin to consider the future of that industry and above all resolve that never again shall we see the men engaged in that industry suffer from neglect as they did in the years before the war.

For there is another connection between coalmining, agriculture and shipping, the three vitally essential industries of the country, and it is that in the years before the war each one of them was in an appalling state of neglect. The Government and the House saw those industries go down and down and down. The rivers were full of ships laid up, our sea-coast ports were full of men, skippers and so on, seeking any kind of job. Our land went completely to rack and ruin. Our miners were out of employment. The Government and the House saw that happening while many luxury industries, many middlemen and speculators, were thriving. I ask my hon. Friend to bear the fishermen in mind in his campaign. I saw the neglect of the fishing industry and their intolerably meagre pay. One wonders why the fishermen took the risk and went through the dangers. The answer is, as my hon. Friend said, that it is in their blood. When I think of the Government's neglect of our seamen, I remember going in a deputation to the Admiralty and being informed by the Admiralty that they did not want the herring boats and that they could do nothing to help the fishermen. Immediately the war came, 80 or 90 per cent. of those herring drifters, which they had told us time and again were useless, were commandeered by them within the first week.

My hon. Friend the Member for Seaham pointed out that the future of this industry is virtually in jeopardy, that it

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

will depend after the war upon finance, the state of international trade, and several other factors. He did not mention one factor, that the future of this industry, the future of agriculture and coalmining, and the future of this country, will depend upon our getting a new and better sense of values. It will depend upon our realising that in future we must never repeat the sins of the past, the neglect of those industries which are the foundation of our national greatness and which have made our Empire. It will depend upon our realising that in future the State and Parliament must not encourage industries on the one test of whether they will pay handsomely and well and produce great profits. We must judge them on the nobler test of whether they will produce the finest quality of men, and on that test we should foster and safeguard our merchant shipping and our fishing fleets at all costs.

Mr. Beechman (St. Ives): I am extremely glad that my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess for Oxford University (Petty Officer Herbert) has taken this opportunity, although it is not by any means the wide one we would have wished, to keep this matter before the House and consequently before the public. The subject has given rise to a lively Debate, which I think has achieved the object of keeping before the public the vital work done by the men of the Merchant Service, always at great risk and with great bravery, and in conditions about which the public does not always know by any means sufficient. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Seaham (Mr. Shinwell) that a commission of inquiry probably would not be the right way to get a move on in this matter. I think that my hon. Friend's demand for a commission, which I then supported, was a useful move in that it was a way of introducing the subject to the public. As I have said, these men always run risks, and they have shown great courage in doing vital work. They are not complaining, but although they are not complaining, those of us who have contacts with them know that they are distressed by certain aspects of their life.

Those aspects may be summed up in three categories—their status, their remuneration, and their conditions of living. We have heard already a great deal about their status. There has been a repetition of suggestions that they should have a uniform, and there have been suggestions that the Merchant Navy should, in some way about which I am not quite clear, be a part of, or ancillary to, the Royal Navy. My feeling is that the Merchant Navy of this country is not a service which is inclined to regimentation, and for my part, I would say, look after their remuneration, look after their safety, look after their living conditions, look after their food, and the status will take care of itself. There has been of late some improvement in regard to pay and remuneration, and on this occasion I would like only to refer to one practical and urgent matter.

Nowadays, when a man goes on a voyage in one of these ships, he may not return, and he wants to know that his family, his wife and dependants, will be properly looked after. I have no complaint to make against the Ministry of Pensions in this matter; although I do not always agree with their decisions, they are cerainly helpful; but I do not know whether the House fully understands how this matter works. When a ship is lost and a man is lost from it, there is an obligation on the shipowner to inform the Government, and then action is taken, as I understand it, to see that the widow obtains her pension. Therefore, I would like it to be impressed upon the shipowners, who, as a whole, respond admirably, that there is this obligation upon them to act without delay, and an obligation also to inform the Regional Officer of the Ministry of Pensions of any dependants who may be involved in a loss of this nature. Only this week I have had a letter from a lady who tells me that she lost her husband in October of last year, and that she has written again and again to the shipping company concerned—it is not a question of a pension, but a similar matter—and she has not yet received the pay which was owing to her husband and that she has received nothing in respect of his effects. I shall send this communication, which I have only just received, to the Department concerned, and I have no doubt it will be looked into.

On the subject of living conditions, I am entirely in agreement with what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Seaham. There has been an improvement, but it must be for the State to see that proper conditions are maintained. It

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Beechman.]
may be difficult now that we are building as many ships as we can and have to put into commission old ships which perhaps would not be employed in ordinary circumstances. One must not generalise too freely. One knows that in a long voyage conditions deteriorate, and that conditions will depend very largely on the climate in which the ship is operating. I hope that the Government will recognise their responsibility in the matter, and that in the new ships coming into commission every effort will be made to see the living conditions of the crews are suitable for the valuable work they are to perform.

We must not forget some of the ancillary services to our Merchant Shipping Service. There is the Coastguard Service. I was glad to receive a letter from the Admiralty informing me that adequate arrangements were being made to provide coastguards and those in auxiliary services with a suitable dress. Their work is of great value, and these men have to be out in all sorts of weather. I have asked again and again for the Coastguard Service to be put under the Royal Navy, because, as far as I can see, that is the only way in which they can be put on a satisfactory basis as far as pensions are concerned. I am interested to hear that coastguards are to come under the Admiralty for operational reasons, but that still does not answer the point I had in mind. In all matters affecting the Merchant Service, it is very difficult to know with which Department one has to deal. Take the question of harbours. It is a nice point to argue whether on a particular matter you should approach the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Fisheries or the Admiralty. I might add that in the case of a haven which you think ought to be a harbour, you cannot find any Minister to deal with the matter. Take lighthouses. I have a great respect for Trinity House, but the Statutes controlling their functions are so antique as to be ludicrous—or they would be ludicrous if they did not affect such serious matters. For instance, who is there to deal with the question of whether a lighthouse should be set up in a place where one does not exist? I suggest that after the war we must have one Minister to take in hand all these matters appertaining to our Merchant Service, and I would include looking after our fishermen, who contribute so many of the finest men to the Merchant Service.

Lieut.-Commander Gurney Braithwaite (Holderness): For many years I have followed with great interest the career of the hon. Member who is now Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of War Transport. I should like, if I may, to take this opportunity to congratulate him on his well-earned promotion. The hon. Member has, for many years, built up for himself a great reputation as an internationalist, and I am convinced, therefore, that he will recognise the international significance of the Red Ensign, and will be sympathetic to the views put forward by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Oxford University (Petty Officer Herbert). I am not one of those who advocate change for the sake of change. I am able to speak objectively on these matters, because it so happens that for the last six months of the last war and for the whole of this war my duties have been in connection with the convoy system. I was astonished and depressed to find on returning to duty in this war that little or no improvement had been made in the general conditions of our Merchant Service. I have been able to study them effectively, because, except for very brief periods, I have not shared the perils of these men, although I have shared their anxieties, particularly in the case of coastal vessels and colliers, which are of such vital importance. The conditions are nothing short of a discredit to a great maritime nation such as Great Britain.

A Debate on this subject took place some five months ago in another place, following which a certain amount of opposition was organised against the suggestion that reform of the Merchant Navy were desirable. No doubt hon. Members received at that time a memorandum circulated by the National Maritime Board. It is about this that I should like to say a few words. I am bound to say that the whole theme of the memorandum is an attempt to create bad blood between the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy at a time when relations between the two Services are better than at any previous period—certainly better than during my lifetime and the lifetime of any other hon. Member in this House. We are told there is no demand on behalf of the officers and men for reforms. The Merchant Navy have never been vocal.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

They have no opportunity to foregather in large parties or at huge meetings. Although I have not had time to look it up in the Library, I believe that when Samuel Plimsoll produced his load-line reform, which has been so beneficial to the Merchant Navy, he was met with the argument that there was no call for it among the officers and men. To-day the Plimsoll line has become almost the Ark of the Covenant in the Merchant Service. Those of us who ask for certainty of employment for the officers and men of the Merchant Navy are told in this memorandum that there is certainty of employment in time of war. That seems to me to show a firm grasp of the obvious. What we are asking for is continuity in the aftermath of this difficult period, when many problems will arise which may affect the economic chances and opportunities of our merchant seamen. Then we are told that the idea of uniform is abhorrent to the officers and men. The circular states:

> "We desire to say straight away that the compulsory wearing of a uniform would be regarded with the greatest suspicion by merchant seamen, more particularly when this so-called reform is advocated by active or retired Naval officers."

Vice-Admiral Taylor (Paddington, South): Who has signed this memorandum?

Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite: It is a circular which has been sent to me and I thought it was sent to all hon. Members. It is sent by the National Maritime Board, and signed by D. M. Robinson, Clerk-in-charge. Included with it is a letter to the Press, signed by a number of gentlemen, the President of the Shipping Federation, the Employers' Association of Liverpool, the Marine Engineers' Association, the Officers (Merchant Navy) Federation, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the National Union of Seamen and the Mercantile Marine Service Association. It is a composite letter to the Press. It deals with the question of uniform. I would ask those who put forward that view—I think it must have been conceived in the office of some shipowner. By whom do they think the auxiliary craft of the Royal Navy are manned? I wonder whether they have ever heard of the Royal Naval Reserve. There must be officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserve in a great many of His Majesty's capital ships, as well as these auxiliary craft, and they wear the uniform with pride and not with any sense of grievance. It is deplorable to suggest, as it is suggested in this memorandum, that they resent association with the White Ensign. I believe that to be entirely untrue. As the Parliamentary Secretary knows, I am honoured by the possession of a brother who, for the second time, in his second war, has been engaged continuously in mine-sweeping. Not long ago I spent a day in his ship, a converted merchantman. There was not a Royal Navy officer or rating on board. All were merchant seamen and fishermen engaged on this vital task to our shipping. It is an extremely happy ship and well disciplined, although my brother might be called a nautical form of blimp when it comes to looking after his crew, but happy none the less and proud to sail under the White Ensign.

Again, we are told that certain things will not be tolerated by the personnel of the Merchant Navy. "Merchant seamen will not tolerate being made an appendage of the Royal Navy, any more than munition workers would tolerate being made a detachment of the Army," says the circular. Surely we have got beyond language of that kind. One might as well say we will not tolerate coal rationing, or clothing coupons, or Income Tax at 10s. in the £. Surely at this moment it is not open to anyone to use such language as that. The nation will tolerate what the Government decide is necessary for the successful waging of the war. I am bound to say that my opinion of shipowners has proceeded in inverse ratio to my admiration for their officers and men. Two days ago the House was debating the vital question of coal. I do not think the point was made that part of the coal problem is due to the shipowners' inveterate adherence to the week-end habit in some of our great ports, certainly as far as the sailing of colliers is concerned. Here is another thing on which the Government might put their hand.

If I may anticipate the criticism which will certainly be made about my hon. and gallant Friend who initiated the Debate, and no doubt myself, that we are amateurs addressing ourselves to this problem, I may say that amateurs are perfectly capable of forming an opinion as to what constitute decent living conditions on board ship, and it is to that matter that I hope the Government will

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite.]
particularly address themselves. I anticipate that we shall have a friendly reply from the Minister. I shall be very disappointed if we get anything else. I hope he will tell the House that the Government will inquire into the matter. If they do, might I suggest to the Minister that he might pursue very fruitful inquiries among the naval control officers who have been busy for two and half years in organising these merchant ships into convoys, and the commodores who have sailed with them and know the conditions at first hand?

Vice-Admiral Taylor (Paddington, South): I very much regret that I was not able to be here to hear the opening speeches in this Debate on shipping and the necessity for inquiry with regard to the conditions of service of the men, and also as to the speed of the ships themselves, which is of the utmost importance. I do not think it is necessary to argue as to the nature of the inquiry. The important thing is to have an inquiry into the whole of the conditions in the Mercantile Marine and the policy for its continuance after the war. Now is the time to go into it, to obtain the evidence and to make up one's mind as to what shall be the policy after the war. At the same time, wherever it is possible now to improve the conditions of the men steps should be taken at once, and I feel certain that that will be done. The hon. and gallant Gentleman who spoke last referred to the Commodores in charge of the convoys. The Parliamentary Secretary, whom I congratulate on his appointment, should please note that officers in charge of the convoys act as a direct link between officers of the Navy and officers and men of the Mercantile Marine. These Commodores are, I think, all officers of Admiral's rank in the Service who are now acting as Commodores R.N.R. in charge of convoys.

Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite: There is also a large number of Commanders R.N.R. drawn straight from the Merchant Service.

Vice-Admiral Taylor: I quite agree, and all credit to them. The service of those officers is of the very highest possible utility to the country, and all honour to them for the way they are serving. They have personal contact with the officers and men in the Merchant Navy and could supply useful information and guidance with regard to the steps that might be taken to improve conditions in the Merchant Navy. There has been for many years close co-operation between the two great sister Services, and I should like to see that co-operation closer still. Every step which would bring closer co-operation between them is all for the benefit of the country, because it is on the two sister Services that the whole existence of the country in peace and war must depend, and nothing will alter that fact. Improvements have taken place, and I believe it to be the case that shipowners as a whole are most anxious to improve the conditions of their men, but there is room for greater improvement. There is no difference of opinion about that. Now is the time to collect the evidence, and now is the time to make up our minds what can be done, so that no time may be lost after the war in forwarding the policy decided on. I most strongly support the suggestion for an inquiry. I should like to pay my tribute to the officers and men of the Merchant Navy for the magnificent way in which they have carried out their services in the war. Never before in the history of the country have their conditions been so exacting, and never has this grand body of men risen to the occasion better than they have done to-day. They indeed deserve well of the country.

The Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of War Transport (Mr. Noel-Baker): I should like to begin by offering my thanks to my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess for Oxford University (Petty Officer Herbert) and my other hon. and gallant Friends for the kind things they have said about me. I should also like to thank my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess for raising this Debate to-day. I agree with him in thinking that it was required. I agree also with my hon. Friend the Member for Seaham (Mr. Shinwell) that our shipping industry and Mercantile Marine raise fundamental questions of policy which me must consider before the war is ended and when we start to make the peace. If it is thought useful to have another Debate—I do not say how soon, but I hope not too soon—on the widest possible lines, dealing with these fundamental issues of policy, I shall be very glad. I am grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess because

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

he has given the House an opportunity of showing that they take a deep interest in the Merchant Navy and in the honourable part which our seamen are playing in the war, and of showing, too, that they are resolved that the services of the seamen, shall not either now or later be unrecognised and unrewarded. Although people say that seamen do not want rhetoric but want results, I think that it does no harm if we in this House show that we know what is going on.

In saying what I shall now say, I include the Mercantile Marines of the Allies fighting on our side, the Belgians, Dutch, Poles, Danes, French, Yugo-Slavs, and perhaps especially the Norwegians and the Greeks—all the Allied seamen who are taking their merchant fleets to sea on our behalf. At a time when we were an island fortress, in 1940, when we were alone against the Germans, we depended for all warlike activities on our supplies of oil. At that time, the Norwegian tanker fleet alone brought us two-fifths of all the oil we used. The Greeks have 1,000,000 tons of shipping serving us. They have had greater losses than any other Merchant Navy in the world, so great that I hesitate to mention the proportion to the House, yet they helped us to supply Tobruk; they are still sailing on every sea. To all these Allies we must express our gratitude.

It is a platitude to say that the life of the nation depends on the Merchant Navy; but it is a platitude about the truth of which too few people take any trouble to think. Everybody knows the great part played by the Merchant Fleet in the last war. Their part has been far more important in this war and far more difficult and dangerous. There are 4,000,000 more mouths to feed in this country. When the last war began we were importing 600,000,000 gallons of oil a year; when this war began we were importing 3,000,000,000. Armament and equipment for the Armed Forces are far more important than in the last war in relation to man-power, we have to have far greater quantities of arms; we are our own arsenal, by far the most important of all our arsenals in the war so far; we have to import vast quantities of steel, and it is an awkward cargo. This time our fighting fronts are not 40 or 400 or 4,000 miles away, as in the last war; they are more like 14,000 miles, round the Cape to the Middle East, the Far East, Australia, and so on.

The seamen on the ships are on the most dangerous of our fighting fronts. They have had the scantiest holidays or rest; they have been at it for three years; they go from port to port, and very often months pass before they even get letters from home. They are subject to the constant attacks of the enemy by submarine, by surface raider and from the air. Their casualties from hostile action, both in dead and injured, are inevitably heavy. When shipwrecked they have to face ordeals more terrible perhaps than any of the war. Quite apart from enemy action, they are beset by far greater marine dangers than in time of peace. They have to sail their ships in convoy without lights at night and through the foulest weather; they have to face the North Atlantic in winter in ships built for the tropics; they have to drive through storms to keep up with their convoy, without heaving to, as they would in peace-time, for several days. Month after month they have to fight cold, ice, fog and mountainous seas. Every day makes its call upon their courage.

In my present office I hear more stories of the valour of the merchant seamen than most people do. I would like to mention two. One is the story of an apprentice, 18 years old on his first voyage at sea. His ship was torpedoed, and three boats got away. In the master's boat there were 34 men, and they had a barrel of water, a box of tinned milk and a tin of hard biscuits. After 14 days the first man died. Then deaths followed quickly. At last only two were left, one of whom was this apprentice. On the 24th day they sighted a man-o'-war, but it did not see them. The other survivor jumped overboard, having, it is believed, gone mad. The apprentice was alone. Five hours later he was picked up by a neutral ship. He was found fishing with mussels as bait, and a bent pin as a hook. He had half a tin of condensed milk left to live on. He was interned by the neutral Power, but he escaped and made his way to this country and immediately joined another merchant ship. There is another story which shows the kind of thing our men have to face. A ship received a signal from another vessel near by which had been dive-bombed and set on fire. She

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Noel-Baker.]

altered her course and went alongside. The chief engineer and the leading salvage man went on board, got on to the skylight of the engine room, and trained the hoses on the flames, knowing very well that at any moment the boilers might explode. In spite of that, the chief engineer lowered himself into the stokehold to release the safety valve. He and his companions were in constant danger of bursting munitions and of fumes. Their boots were burned away and their feet were in a frightful condition, but they went on for four hours until they had subdued the flames, and so were able to bring the vessel safely home. There is common agreement that for such men as these we cannot do too much, either now, while the struggle continues, or when the war is won.

The main difference between my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess and other hon. Members and myself relates to the question of a Royal Commission. Like my hon. and gallant Friend, I have a certain feeling for Royal Commissions. Perhaps that comes from our common fondness for academic institutions. In any case, I agree with him in thinking that it is very unfair on Royal Commissions that, owing to the inevitable delays of their procedure, and the fact that no Government ever seems to carry out their recommendations, they have gained a reputation which they do not deserve. But let us take a recent example. A Royal Commission on Armament Production was set up in 1935. It worked with extraordinary speed and produced its report in two years. Its recommendations were tabulated in sets of ten points under ten main headings; so that it was quite simple by a mathematical calculation, to discover that the Government carried out one half of one per cent. of them. If those recommendations had been carried out, we should have been in an incomparably better position than we are to-day to fight the war. But they were not carried out. Even when they themselves do extremely well, Royal Commissions rarely succeed; and I am afraid it is no wonder they have acquired the reputation of being a good way of burying a troublesome question about which action is required. That is really the essence of the case that I put to my hon. and gallant Friend and to the House about a Royal Commission and it applies to a Royal Commission either now or after the war.

I have said that a Royal Commission is unnecessary, and I think so because, in spite of all that has been said about it, the National Maritime Board, I still believe that Board can do a considerable part of the necessary work, and that anything it is asked to do it will do extremely well. In addition, there is in the Ministry, as part of its machinery, a Shipping Advisory Council, on which the whole shipping world is represented, where the members are free to raise anything they like and to debate it with the Minister himself, and where, if there is a demand for it, all the questions raised to-day can be discussed. That Council ensures the closest touch between the Minister and those who are operating the ships at sea.

Not only do I think that a Royal Commission is unnecessary, but I put it with respect to my hon. and gallant Friends that it would be inexpedient if not pernicious. As my hon. Friend the Member for Seaham said, if there is a Royal Commission, questions which arise are always pushed over to it, and we do not take the action that is required. Often it would be almost impossible, or at least most embarrassing, to take action, because the very question might be, so to speak, *sub judice*, before the Royal Commission, and so, if you did decide upon a line of policy, it would be prejudicing the decision which the Royal Commission might make. Moreover, it might lead different sections of the industry, which at present are working together extremely well, to jockey for position. It would certainly introduce into the present situation an element of uncertainty, which I believe would seriously delay the progress that is now going on.

I hope that my hon. and gallant Friends will recognise the force of the contention I have laid before the House and be convinced that the shadow of a Royal Commission might tend to discourage present developments which we all want to secure. In spite of what has been said, and in spite of the letters which my hon. and gallant Friend has received, I believe that the creation of a Royal Commission would be against the strongly expressed desires of the vast majority of those most intimately concerned. Not only is there no evidence that they want it, but there is a great

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

deal of evidence that they do not want it. The National Maritime Board is a body of a very representative character, and I am grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Holderness (Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite) for reading their letter to the House. The present chairman of the Chamber of Shipping said in his presidential address recently that there is no more successful and constructive part of our industrial machinery than the National Maritime Board, and I think his opinion is entitled to respect. Only yesterday I was talking to perhaps the principal leader of the seamen, the general secretary of the National Union of Seamen, and to several of his colleagues; and the language in which they talked about a Royal Commission would have been of great interest to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Oxford University.

The Government, at any rate, are satisfied that the objects which are sought by his proposal can be far better attained by the methods which they are at present pursuing, that is to say, by their own action and by co-operation with the National Maritime Board. I have always thought of the National Maritime Board as the Whitley Council of the industry. When my hon. and gallant Friend says that it is the wrong body to do this job, because the State are not represented, I say in reply that nobody has ever proposed that they should do the whole job; but for a part of the job one could hardly have a more satisfactory or a more representative mechanism. Every employers' organisation and every society or trade union of the officers and men is represented. There is equality of numbers on the two sides of the table. They work in six panels—masters, officers, radio officers, engineers, deck hands and the rest. They have a long record of extremely successful work, which has grown more and more successful in recent years.

I would remind the House of a few things which have been done by the National Maritime Board since the war began. They have raised the basic rate for navigating and engineer officers by £2 a month, the basic rate for adult ratings by £1 and the basic rate for boys by 10s. They have given war risk money of £5 a month and negotiated what they call the "differential payment" of £2 a month to bring wages more nearly to the level of those paid to the seamen in the merchant fleets of our allies. They have arranged for compensation for loss of effects as a result of wreck or loss by marine risk; the Government looking after enemy-action risk. They have arranged special leave for navigating officers and engineers who have to work more than the normal hours. They have arranged overtime rates for crews when they are in port. They have given an increased subsistence allowance to officers and engineer officers when they are working their vessels in port. They have made various other arrangements to the advantage of the crews of smaller ships.

Vice-Admiral Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what the port welfare committees have done, because that is very important?

Mr. Noel-Baker: I am coming to that.

Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite: Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House how many of the beneficent reforms he has outlined were brought about on the initiative of the National Maritime Board? Is it not the case that great pressure had to be put upon them to initiate them?

Mr. Noel-Baker: It depends upon what my hon. and gallant Friend means by pressure, whether it is from or upon the Board. A great many things have been done by pressure from the Officers' Association and the Seamen's Union—I do not say that the Government are not in favour of them. Many things are done by the Board as a result of suggestions from one side or the other, and it is natural that the greater part of such suggestions come from the Seamen's Union and the Officers' Association. That, indeed, shows how useful the Board can be, just because the officers and seamen are adequately represented. But I do not want the House to think that it is only the Maritime Board that have done anything for the improvement of seamen's conditions. A very considerable number of measures of real importance have been arranged by the Government. Officers and men of the Merchant Navy can travel at half fares when they are on leave; four times a year they can travel home free, like the troops, on vouchers which they are given. Railway tickets are given free to the relatives of seamen who come home dangerously ill from sea, so that these relatives may go to the port to meet them.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Noel-Baker.]

There are special arrangements, as I have said, for compensation for loss of effects. There is a scheme of compensation which is of the very highest importance, compensation for war injury; it is, roughly speaking, on the same model as that operating in the Navy. From the very beginning of the war it has been applied to the Merchant Navy. I do not say that we are completely satisfied with that scheme. There are points about it being considered now, and others that will need to be looked into. But, when that scheme was introduced, it was widely welcomed as an immense advance on what was done in the last war. It was put forward by the Government spontaneously at the very start, and up to the present time it has been of the greatest possible advantage.

Vice-Admiral Taylor: I would like to put one more question to the hon. Gentleman, which may possibly be irrelevant. It was the custom, when a man was discharged sick abroad, that he lost his pay. Has that point been dealt with?

Mr. Noel-Baker: Yes, Sir, it has been put right. They receive pay and some other allowances for a considerable period; unless I am mistaken, it is for three months.

Mr. Buchanan (Glasgow, Gorbals): Has anything been done in the case of British sailors who sail in Allied ships or in ships owned by neutrals, such as Sweden and who have lost their lives? Is nothing done for the widows while the authorities stand wrangling as to who was responsible for the death? Who accepts responsibility in cases of such disputes, whether it was done by enemy action or in the ordinary course of duty?

Mr. Noel-Baker: I greatly regret that any dispute should arise about that sort of question, but the hon. Member will appreciate that, in working any regulations, you sometimes get to the point where dispute arises. Seamen in Allied ships are treated on the same footing as those in British ships. Whether they are of Allied or of our own nationality, they benefit by the arrangements I have described. I should like to have notice regarding men in neutral ships, for example, Swedish ships, because I am not absolutely sure what the precise arrangements at present are.

Mr. Buchanan: Three cases have been brought to my notice. One in particular related to a ship which was obviously sailing for our Government. The ship went down, and a certain man lost his life. The widow had to live on public assistance for months or upon anything she could get while both sides were disputing. The poor woman had lost her husband in the Service.

Mr. Noel-Baker: If the hon. Member will send me particulars of that case, I will look into it.

Mr. Buchanan: I sent them to the hon. Gentleman's predecessor, but he did nothing. I will try the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Noel-Baker: At any rate, I can look into the matter. I am now informed that even in neutral ships the arrangements I have described apply, so I do not understand what happened in my hon. Friend's case. I will look into it and let my hon. Friend know.

When our seamen are made prisoner by the enemy, they are paid their wages while they are in German prison camps. That change was made not many months ago. I think it was right, and I am glad that it was made. It was another action by the Government officers and men whom we take out of civil employment and send back to sea are able to obtain grants for their kit and their equipment. There is also a very large system of clubs, institutes and hostels which carry on what may be called welfare work. They are for seamen in this country and abroad. The Ministry of Labour is primarily responsible for them, and there is a Central Seamen's Welfare Committee with wide representation, here in London. There is a Port Welfare Committee in every important port. They have their own officers, and the officer of the Ministry of War Transport always co-operate in the work of those committees. I have myself visited a number of these clubs and institutes in some of our ports and I formed the opinion that they are extremely good and very well run. The Foreign Office has co-operated in helping to establish such clubs and institutes in foreign countries, wherever our ships may go. The United States have been extremely good about it, and the citizens of that country have paid large sums of money to create clubs and hostels for our men.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

I do not say that everything is perfect. A place like Freetown, on the West Coast of Africa, is not exactly a health resort to begin with; it is very congested, and it may leave something to desire in this respect. But the Government have made a great effort, and big results have been obtained. I can assure hon. Members that the Treasury have never once raised any objection to a single pound of our expenditure, and, if hon. Members can suggest improvements and developments, I shall be very glad to see whether they can be carried out.

Vice-Admiral Taylor: I am sorry to have to ask another question, but this is a matter on which I have a personal interest. I was Chairman of the London Port Welfare Council for some five years before the Government took it over, and therefore I take a great interest in port welfare for the Merchant Navy. When the hon. Member spoke about clubs and hostels, I wondered whether he referred to the British Sailors' Society, Mission to Seamen, etc., and their clubs and hostels, or to the hostels and clubs or inquiry offices which have been set up by the Port Welfare Committees. There is a reason for my asking that question. Rightly or wrongly, and although I have nothing to say against the British Sailors' Society, etc., for the exceedingly good work which they have done and are doing, it is a fact that some seamen will not go there because there is a parson. I am very strongly of the opinion that the Port Welfare Committee should set up their own place to which all seamen can go. That is why I am raising this matter.

Mr. Noel-Baker: It is true that many of these clubs are run by voluntary societies, and some of them have parsons. But very many seamen go to those clubs; I have found them very full of seamen, who seemed to appreciate what was done for them. But there are now other places, run by the Government itself. I recommend to my hon. and gallant Friend one on the Tyneside run by the Government and which they call I believe the British Merchant Marine Hostel. The principle and system vary from place to place, but in general, the Government are seeking to do everything that will be effective.

I now come to the question of conditions on the ships. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Seaham is here, because I go very far in agreeing with what he thinks, and what he said to-day on the subject. Conditions on British merchant ships used to be much less good than any of us would desire. I remember a report by the sanitary officer for Hull and Goole, not many years before the war, in which, classifying the accommodation on ships which came into his port and which he had to examine, he said that the Scandinavian ships came first, the Dutch second, the American third, and the United Kingdom ships fourth. I do not say that that was a general rule for all ports; but that official report was made, and I regret it. Since that time, however, there has been a very great improvement, as my hon. Friend has said. Of course when my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess for Oxford University receives a letter from a man who says " he wonders whether steps will be taken to improve the foul conditions on the average tramp," he must remember that during this war we have to send to sea anything that will steam from one side of the Atlantic to the other. We cannot pick our ships. We must take anything that will get the stuff across, and we must say to the men who go on board, " We are sorry, it is awfully bad, but the troops have to face horrible things in the front line and you are in a front line, and perhaps the most important front line there is."

Whenever there is a case of avoidable bad conditions, the Ministry does, on the instant, institute an inquiry. There have been several since I was at the Ministry. The inspector goes into everything with the utmost care, and tries to find out why things went wrong. He will not readily accept the argument that it was the men's fault. The good old days when you could say that a ship was lousy because the men were dirty have long gone by. If, in fact, the men did not wash themselves or their clothes enough, perhaps it was because they never had a bath to wash in. Every attempt is made to improve the conditions on the old ships which we have to use. In the new ships which are being built, I think my hon. and gallant Friend and all hon. Members would really be satisfied with what is being done, or at least they would agree that there has been a big advance. I have seen a number of these ships in different shipbuilding yards, and the accommodation now is very different from what it used to be. I hope and believe that we shall keep up the im-

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Noel-Baker.]

proved standard and continually raise it, both now and after the war.

I must now say a word or two on some other immediate issues which hon. Members have raised. There is the question of uniform and of having a status equal to the Navy. I do not think I need say very much about uniform, because, if I may say so, I think my hon. Friend the Member for Seaham made a devastating case against the uniform on practical grounds. As my hon. and gallant Friend said, the officer in the Merchant Marine already has a uniform, and on a passenger liner at sea he wears it; but not many of them wear it elsewhere. I submit that there is overwhelming evidence that the vast majority of the men not only do not want a uniform, but want the talk about a uniform to be completely killed. All the responsible leaders of the men whom I have been able to reach agree that that is true. As for the question of their being entertained in port, here or abroad, they have now got their Merchant Navy Badge, of which they are extremely proud, which they all wear, and which in the ports of the world is now becoming just as good a passport into naval canteens or other institutions as any uniform.

I come now to pensions. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Beechman) said that there is a serious lag in the payment of pensions. I will look into the question and see whether something can be done, and if my hon. Friend knows of any particular case, I should be glad if he would let me have particulars. With regard to the larger point raised by my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess about the difference between marine risk and war risk, about death from marine risk being borne by the employer as workmen's compensation and death from war risk being borne by the Government because it is a matter of national service, all I can say on that point is that it has come to my attention and that I was already actually inquiring into it. I am consulting now with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Pensions, who, of course, is primarily concerned. I have omitted to mention the Merchant Navy reserve pool, which has given continuity of employment, more leave, pay while at home and other advantages of a most important kind, and which has greatly served the national interest by keeping ships at sea. That will, I hope, in some form or another, be continued in times to come. That, of course, was set up by the National Maritime Board and the Government acting in co-operation together.

Having thus given a sketch of what the National Maritime Board and the Government have done, either independently of each other or acting together, I want now to talk about the future and the five " E's " mentioned by my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess. In the passage from my Noble Friend's speech in another place which was read to the House, it is made quite plain that my Noble Friend had asked the National Maritime Board to consider continuity of employment, the conditions of entry into the Service, education and the other things of which my hon. and gallant Friend spoke. In fact, he has also asked them to consider the question of an " exit pension." I believe that if I could show the whole case to my hon. and gallant Friend, he would see that his five " E's " are covered. My Noble Friend has asked the Board to bring their deliberations to the stage of definite proposals as soon as possible, and he has done that saying, as he did in another place, that the Government want " to plan in advance " to meet the needs of the Merchant Marine, as in other phases of post-war reconstruction. It is quite plain that the part of the National Maritime Board is to make proposals; but the Government's action does not end when the proposals are made. What action may be taken we cannot now say, but the point is that my Noble Friend intends to continue his consideration of the matter in order to formulate a policy. The object of his policy is perfectly plain. He has stated it again and again. He wants to ensure that after the war there shall be a merchant navy which shall be adequate in strength and which shall be fully efficient; and he has defined efficiency as including the best possible conditions for the officers and men of the merchant marine.

Stating that that is the purpose of the Government, I add this: My hon. Friend the Member for Seaham is perfectly right when he argues that shipping is part of our general economic structure, and that it cannot be prised apart and treated by itself. My Noble Friend said that the " problems of the Merchant Navy personnel are obviously closely bound up with those of

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

the whole shipping industry, and those in turn are bound up with the immense question of post-war policy and reconstruction."

When my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess says, "I am not very patient when I hear people talk about the blue-print of a better world," I say to him in reply that whatever kind of world we have, we must try and do our best for shipping. And speaking for myself, I hope that whatever kind of world we have, we shall do better than we did last time. But even my hon. and gallant Friend the Senior Burgess must recognise that the true prosperity of seamen must depend on the prosperity of international trade. Lord Essendon said not long ago that the foundation of the British merchant fleet would always be the medium-sized tramp. What does the medium-sized tramp do? It goes from port to port all over the world. It can only be properly employed if we have active, prosperous, multilateral, international trade, and that, if I may say so, is, to my mind, the international significance of the Red Ensign. For this reason, the pledges of the Atlantic Charter are of fundamental importance to the future of the shipping industry. The Atlantic Charter talks of opening free access to trade to all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, after the war, in order to promote their economic prosperity. It says that the Governments are all going to work together in the economic field to promote international trade, raise labour standards, promote economic advancement and social security. It has been proved that our Government and the Government of the United States desire to make these pledges a reality by the new Lease-Lend arrangements they made the other day. I would like, speaking from this place, to plead with the shipping interests, the shipbuilders, the owners, officers and men, to recognise that it is their vital interest that these pledges should be made a reality. I hope that they may learn the lesson of the last 10 years. Anyone who thinks we can go back to the 1939 world, to international unrest, competitive national armaments, national economic autarchy, latent or economic or military war—anyone who thinks we can go back to all that and still have a really prosperous shipping industry, is living in a fool's paradise, or perhaps I had better say, a fool's inferno. Even under those conditions we should have to try and do better for shipping than before. But if the Governments of the world can manage their reconstruction aright, we can make of the shipping industry, and of the noble profession of the sea, a far finer thing than it has ever been before.

BOYS (HOURS OF WORK).

Mr. Kenneth Lindsay (Kilmarnock): I feel that it is almost improper to bring forward another subject after that great peroration, but we are now to consider a subject the origin of which is a question by the hon. Member for Westhoughton (Mr. Rhys Davies), who asked the Minister of Labour:

"whether he is aware that the chairman of the local education committee recently stated that many of the 17-year-old Huddersfield boys who recently registered were working such long hours that they could not be recommended to join pre-Service units and that they suffered from exhaustion, mental and physical; and whether he will look into the matter?"—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 14th March, 1942; col. 1175, Vol. 378.]

My right hon. Friend naturally has not got the facts before him, but perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary to-day will be able to give us some information from Huddersfield. Then, when I further questioned the Minister of Labour, he made what was to me a somewhat surprising statement when I gave him some figures of long hours. He said that this was one of the reasons that the Cabinet agreed to the registration of boys and girls, and that it was the first time there had ever been an opportunity to find out how boys and girls were actually being treated. If that is so, it is not stated in any of the cards which the boys themselves fill up, and it is pure accident whether the interviewing committee finds out any of these details, for they are not under any obligation to do so themselves. I have been interviewing for many nights, and in my particular area we put on the back of the cards the exact number of hours which the boys are working, checking them up afterwards, and I later propose to give the House some of these figures.

I am very glad that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is replying to this Debate, because I know of his great interest, as a recent chairman of the Association of Education Committees, in this subject, and of his very practical

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Lindsay.]

knowledge, especially of the cotton industry. I hope that he will be able to give me some reassuring answer and not the sort of answer we get from the Minister of Health, that sort of slick answer; I had one to-day about Maycrete huts. It does not do any good. I was not asking to catch him out, but because I happened to know the facts and wanted to know whether he intended to do anything about them. We are getting rather tired of such answers, both from him and his Parliamentary Secretary. In the Debate which was inaugurated by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Lipson) recently, my hon. Friend sitting opposite agreed with remarks I made about hours. He said it seemed to him " that the evil of the high wage lay not in the amount of money, but rather in the excessive hours that that wage represented, and the possible physical effect on the growing youth." He did add in a qualifying phrase that consideration had to be given to the fact that many a boy of 16 and 17 was almost equal in physique to a man.

I do not intend to go into the question of the Potteries. That has been debated in the House of Lords. May I say—and I am a very strong supporter of trade unions, and have been all the time I have been in politics—that I was a little alarmed to read that some trade unionists said that it was not the business of the House of Lords to interfere in the matter? The House of Lords were not the only people who were aware of this increase in hours in the Potteries; questions have been asked here. I understand that it was a very exceptional situation, that certain girls were suddenly removed, and they had—although this excuse is often given in these matters—to fill up with juveniles.

Now we hear that the same thing is happening in the cotton industry. On this occasion the Minister of Labour said that he was satisfied that " war requirements of various kinds " made it necessary. I would like to know what war requirements of various kinds are, because it may be a different reason from the case in the Potteries. My hon. Friend was present in the negotiations, and as he has intimate experience of the cotton industry, no doubt he will be able to tell us more, and also be able to tell us how it was that the cotton industry lost so many people by the process of concentration and then could not get them back. I believe they wanted some 10,000. The employers apparently wanted to increase the hours by seven and a half a week, but the operatives would agree only to four hours, so that now we have 52 hours per week in the cotton industry—I am speaking about young people under 16—52 in the cotton industry and 53 hours in the pottery industry. What I want to know is, where are we going to stop? The hours are creeping up for the 14 to 16 group, from 44 to 52 and 53. The hours for those between 16 and 18 are creeping up from 48 to 54, 56, 58, 60, 70 and 75. I have got to be persuaded by my hon. Friend that these steps are vital to the war effort and are not resulting in physical and mental disability, and I have got to be persuaded that it is not gravely affecting the future physique of these boys. If he can prove that, I shall be quite satisfied.

But the chaos of hours between the ages of 14 and 18, and the absenteeism from school, which I may remind my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education is increasing, the weakening of the whole business of apprenticeship—these questions have been familiar to some of us for many years, but this is not the time to make them worse. I wish to try to prove to the House that we are running into a dangerous situation and that I think the time has arrived for a special inquiry into the whole question. I hope my hon. Friend will agree with that. I will give one or two quotations. This is from a man who has been looking at the interviews over the last few weeks:

> " The problem of long hours was found in the main war industries. A number of boys were working ten or more hours on four or five days a week. In many of these cases the effect on their physical and social development was greatly accentuated by the distances they had to travel to work."

When people have to work 50, 60, or 70 hours a week, it often becomes much longer when you add the hours they have to travel. You must picture a boy, in some cases, getting up at seven o'clock in the morning, and arriving back at home at eight at night.

> " Cases were quoted of boys leaving home at 7.15 in the morning and not returning until 8 at night, and the general impression gained was

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

that a high proportion of boys in these industries were being worn out at an important stage in their development by the prevailing industrial conditions."

That is from a man on the spot.

The Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour (Mr. Tomlinson): Where?

Mr. Lindsay: I would rather give the name of the places afterwards in each case. I want to tell my hon. Friend of a few cases that came to my notice last night: fitter's mate, 8 a.m.-7 p.m., shop assistant, 8.30 a.m.-6 p.m.; engineer, 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; stores assistant, 6.30 to 5; and a van guard, 8.30 to 6 p.m. This morning, quite gratuitously, because somebody had noticed that the question had been raised, I heard from another place where boys have been interviewed; of 78 who are not being sent to any of the youth organisations, in 59 cases it was because of the long hours of work. You cannot ask a young fellow to work 60 or more hours a week, and then to join the Air Training Corps for the defence of his country. The thing becomes absurd. I will give some more figures from a country district. There is an aircraft worker, doing 65 hours a week, with night shifts in alternate months. He had to give up night classes owing to long hours, although, as an apprentice, he should attend. Another averaged 67 hours a week. He was a member of the cadets, but had to resign owing to his long hours. Another worked for a precision tool company from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. and eight hours Saturday and Sunday. Another, in an aircraft factory, worked 65 to 70 hours a week, including five nights per week overtime, and Saturday afternoons and usually Sundays. Another worked from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. and most week-ends—probably medically unfit for the Services. Another, 62 hours a week at an aerodrome. He wants to join the R.A.F. Time after time, these boys have come to me and said, "Of course I want to join." The craze now is the Naval Cadets. Last night I found no fewer than nine wanting to join. Actually there is no unit for them to join, but that is another story. Sheffield was mentioned the other day. I have not had time to go into this, but my hon. Friend, through his inspectorate, has the figures. The Minister said he would look into it. As far as I know, in Sheffield there are a number of boys working over 60 hours a week. It may be a much larger number; but these have not been investigated carefully, and I do not wish to quote them, except to say that it is probable that some of them are true. I know that in some cases the double hours on Sunday have been included in the figures. The actual cases that I have quoted I have been careful, of course, to check.

What is worrying me about all this is that we really do not know what is happening between the ages of 14 and 16. I am extremely glad that this 16-18 registration scheme has come in, and we have been trying for three months to have a Debate on it in this House. I know that Malaya and Singapore have knocked that on the head. It is not the fault of the Government that we have not had a Debate.

Mr. Martin (Southwark, Central): We have not had a Debate on Malaya and Singapore.

Mr. Lindsay: That is another question. The House does not seem to find much time to consider these questions which affect the growing generation. This morning I could not help contrasting the, almost, delight which the Minister for Home Security showed about closing up the "Daily Mirror" with his absolute refusal to do anything about fun fairs. He treated that as rather a joking matter. I spent a good deal of last week-end going round a dozen of these places, not far from here; and I have not any doubt that at those places I saw mentally defective boys and mentally defective girls. Obviously they were physically defective. I saw a great many other undesirable people. I rang up Mr. Henriques this morning to check up on his letter in the "Times," and I propose to go to see his court on Monday. His estimate was that 19 out of 20 cases of juvenile delinquency were associated with these places. I mention that only in passing, because here we have the future of Britain. We have heard much about blue prints and new orders, but the future of Britain is between the ages of 14 and 18, or else at school. There is no doubt that the generation growing up is going to suffer from the dislocation of the educational system.

I have often praised the results of evacuation when the people have stayed in the country, but there can be no doubt

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Lindsay.]

that, on balance, it has resulted in a most unfavourable situation as regards school children. Some 20,000 children have returned to London since Christmas. I had three boys last night who ought to have gone through with central school education up to the age of 15, but left at the age of 14, and they told me that they could never pick up again. You have that situation to deal with throughout the country. You have also something else. In one particular place at the present time 129 employers were warned, and, I think, 11 were summoned, for irregularities about boys working out of school hours. I mention that because it was quoted in one of the educational papers, the "Times Educational Supplement." All this means that, in addition to irregularities and dislocation in the educational system, there are irregularities and dislocation in regard to working hours for youths of 14 to 18. Do not let my hon. Friend think that I have just discovered this. I am not bringing this matter up solely because these cases have come out through registration. This is an old problem, but it has been made worse by the war. My hon. Friend has to prove that this is vital to the war effort. I want to make it clear that in many cases these boys said, "I had to go on with the job; it is part of the war." The Circular from the Board of Education precisely says that there will be a number of young people who will not be able to join because of their exceptional hours of work, and I am not sure that I agree that that clause should have been inserted, as it is to some extent condoning the situation. The boys themselves are placed in a very difficult position. They ask whether they can help the war effort most by the working 60 and 65 hours that I have mentioned or by joining a training corps? They ought to be doing something as a result of which they get into the fresh air and participate in some sort of recreation. I have one other series of cases but I will not quote them in detail, because they are exceptional and belong to London, but I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education to take note that in London, and especially in Central London, there are boys in very well-known clubs and hotels who are working all night and for 50 and 60 hours a week. Some effort ought to be made to arrange classes for them in the middle of the day, because I understand that, though the number of hours they work may be nominally 12 a day, they have three hours off in this period, and if something could be done for their physical recreation it would be a very great help.

The time has come to demand an inquiry into this growing tendency to increase hours. I cannot talk about the registration scheme to-day in detail, because that is a bigger question. We ask boys, and shortly we are going to ask girls, to join some pre-service training unit or else to take up the evening classes which they have not been able to attend. Experienced people in London with whom I have been in contact during the last 48 hours and who know what a boy looks like when he is tired, have no doubt about this matter. I will give one example from South London. I rang up such a person yesterday and asked him for his opinion about this question. I was told that they called a meeting of the social workers, teachers and others in the borough, and, said my friend, "I put to them the question, 'Have you in your interviews found that boys are coming in tired after long hours?'" There was laughter, and they then produced case after case from their own experience. I beg of my hon. Friend to consider these serious cases. There are two separate parts of this problem, one is the extension of four or five hours in the cotton and pottery trades which is done by Government Order; the other seems to be a flaunting of the Factory Acts, and in some cases I doubt whether any Act covers the period from 16 to 18. What has happened to the factory inspectorate since it moved over from the Home Office to the Ministry of Labour?

Mr. Tomlinson: The factory inspectorate have been busy.

Mr. Lindsay: I know that they have a lot of extra work to do in connection with A.R.P. and so on, and I am one who welcomed the change to the Ministry of Labour and said that it was in closer harmony with the remainder of the work of the right hon. Gentleman, but is it working now? If so, how is it that every time a question like this comes up the Ministry of Labour has to say, "My attention has not been called to this, but I will look into it"? The inspectorate ought to be aware when a problem has grown to these dimensions. Is the inspectorate sufficiently

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

strong to keep track of this growing evil? I hope to see a new generation of from 14 to 18 growing up with a greater sense of citizenship and with a finer physique than generations in the past. I have been staggered by the response of the young people, although it is absolutely voluntary. Last night 19 out of 20 turned up, and some of them came at 9 o'clock because they could not get away from work before. They demand to be allowed to help and to serve the country. They are only too anxious to improve their lot and also to do something in the service of their country; the least we can do is to give them the chance.

Mr. Goldie (Warrington): I had no intention of intervening in this Debate but I was so intensely interested in the speech of the hon. Member for Kilmarnock (Mr. Lindsay) that I would like to detain the House for a few minutes in referring to it. It happens that my association with youth has been rather on different lines from those he has just described. It is my unfortunate experience to have to deal to a great extent with adolescent crime. I endorse every word that he has said with regard to the question of fun fairs. I have realised to the full the real danger there is in these places, not so much from the point of view of going there for innocent amusement, as from that of the absolute and utter waste of time and money by young people who are not old enough to resist the temptations to which they have to submit. I ventured to put a Supplementary Question to-day to the Home Secretary, and I sincerely trust that we shall succeed in getting him to strengthen the measures to be enforced with regard to these places, which are nothing more or less than a pest to society.

In my constituency I have a great deal to do with the question of juvenile labour. I do not think that the Parliamentary Secretary himself would attempt to justify the hours of labour that are being worked. I would go a step further than the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and ask in view of what is taking place in an industrial constituency like my own, whether these hours of labour are really necessary. I agree that at the end of a long day's work a youth is tired out in a way that he ought not to be, but my information in my own constituency is that these boys, who are anxious to help in the national effort, are only wasting their time and that of their employers. In my constituency and in the South West Lancashire area an enormous number of boys are employed not on productive or useful work, but as fitters' mates and are drawing really high wages for doing nothing more than brewing tea for their mates. The matter has been raised by those not of the same political views as myself, in the local borough council. We went into it carefully, and the figures that we discovered were simply amazing. The way to tackle this problem is to ensure that, if these long hours have to be worked, they should be worked only where useful work is produced. An enormous amount could be done if we could make it possible for these boys to be released for the purpose of attending their clubs and getting proper recreation, instead of doing what they are doing now, namely, wasting their time and that of their employers.

Idleness, of course, is a curse. Any one who can see what is going on now in regard to adolescent crime—I cannot speak of juvenile crime—knows the tragedy that has resulted to lads who have had their chance in the juvenile courts, have failed to take it and have then degenerated into crime for one reason or another but chiefly because they have not had proper training. We have a new generation coming on. Our generation did all it could for the country in the last war. The present generation is doing the same now. It is up to us to do all we can to help the rising generation and I agree with the hon. Member for Kilmarnock that the way to proceed is to do all we can to enable these lads, keen and active as they are, to help their country, to render useful service and at the same time, become better members of society.

Mr. Denman (Leeds, Central): There will certainly be gratitude at the raising of this question to-day by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock (Mr. Lindsay). Undoubtedly there is growing disquiet at the attitude which the Ministry of Labour has taken towards juvenile employment. I suggest that all would accept as one of the basic principles on which we are conducting this war, a determination to minimise the injury it will do to British youth. We even try, with some hopefulness, to extract from it what benefit can be

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Denman.]

extracted in certain directions. The Board of Education and the Ministry of Food, notably, have both acted on that principle and have endeavoured not only to preserve our youth from unnecessary injury, but even to take some advantage from existing conditions. But the Minister of Labour has not attempted to do this.

Mr. Tomlinson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Denman: Well, I shall be glad to hear what case can be made out for the right hon. Gentleman. It seems to me that he has not adequately resisted the pressure which has been put upon him. I know what pressure is put in war-time on Government Departments to relax laws and regulations relating to youths. We had the same problem in the last war. A great deal of the pressure is entirely legitimate. Boys and girls want to give what help they can in the common war effort, and nobody desires to hinder them from this very legitimate and fine desire, in so far as it is compatible with their permanent welfare. Whenever there is a shortage of labour there has been the plea that the use of young persons is the easiest remedy. People at once fly to it as a solution of their difficulties. But while this is the easiest solution, it is also the experience of those who have had to deal with the problem, that Parliament and Ministries have only to stand firm and industry will always find some other method of overcoming their difficulties. It may mean a more difficult piece of organisation, but industry, as long as Parliament and Ministries stand firm, always discovers an alternative method.

Members will recollect their experience even before the last war. In 1914 we had a modest Measure which, among other things, sought to abolish "half-time" in the cotton industry and also that curious privilege enjoyed by glass factories of employing young persons at night. In each case there was strong opposition from the trades concerned. It was said on behalf of the cotton industry that they would incur considerable injury if "half-time" in the industry were abolished, and, as regards night work for young people in glass factories, I recollect that a deputation came here and said that this industry would be ruined if this old privilege, under an Act of the last century, were taken away from them. Well, within four years we had abolished those two systems by Act of Parliament and the industries have not suffered. Nowadays, anyone who contemplated "half-time" conditions, or night work by young persons in glass factories, would be living in the realm of a bad dream, the thing would be so remote and unreal.

I suggest that the Minister has only to stand firm and he will find that industry can get on quite well without these concessions. We should recollect that the existing law as regards young persons from 14 to 16, is that the normal maximum in factories is 44 hours. That we achieved in 1937 in this Parliament, after a very considerable battle. I know there are possible provisions for exceptional treatment in certain cases, but 44 hours is the normal maximum for persons under the age of 16. What justification was there, in the case of the Potteries, for going up to 53 hours? There, it was never alleged that the product was needed for the prosecution of the war. Production was, apparently, for the normal civilian industry and it probably would have been highly virtuous if consumption of the commodities so produced had been reduced. But, as I say, there was "never an allegation that the product was needed for the prosecution of the war. In the cotton spinning industry there is something fantastic about the whole procedure. Here you have hours increased from 44 to 52. Only a short time ago the whole industry was almost compulsorily concentrated. Factories were put out of action because there was not enough to do and because it was desired to reduce production. Having done that, the Ministry then increase the hours of these children. It really does seem quite fantastic. If the Minister had taken a strong line the industry would have adopted some other course.

There is this further feature about special provision for long hours. It encourages a tendency to disregard the law all round. If people see that in certain work longer hours are permitted, they will almost inevitably take advantage of peculiar circumstances to add to the hours without any legal authority whatever. I think this will gradually tend to produce relaxation all round which will tend to break down the whole system of restriction of these children's hours of work. I ask

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

especially, as did my hon. Friend opposite, that the inspectorate should be given every encouragement. If they see that the Minister is weak-kneed about it, if they see that he is apt to give way, it is very difficult for them to maintain the law or respect for the legal restrictions that have already been achieved. In the Home Office we had considerable experience of the extent of this, and I think both industry and those interested in the protection of childhood had immense confidence in that body; but I am bound to say that we feel less sure that the inspectorate is receiving adequate support from the Minister of Labour, less sure that it is receiving as good support as it used to receive from the Home Secretary. I ask the Ministry not to let down that great organisation, but to maintain it with the traditions it has built up after a great many years to protect children from doing excessive hours of work.

Mr. Martin (Southwark, Central): It was not my intention to intervene in this Debate. Indeed I did not know that it was to take place and I had not collected data which otherwise I would gladly have presented to the House. But I think I should fail in my duty to my constituents if I did not say a few words about the deplorable effect these long hours are having, not only on boys and girls in essential war industries, but boys and girls employed in industries that are not essential to the war effort, or only very slightly essential to it. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock (Mr. Lindsay) has referred to this, but I think it is a matter which requires to be stressed. The position with regard to boys employed in public houses, hotels, and in many industries which are not really primarily essential to the war effort, is very serious. These children, many of them boys of only 14 or 15, are working as many as 12 or 14 hours a day from the time they leave home in the morning to the time they return home in the evening. I am convinced, as I think everybody who has had experience of young people is convinced, that this is most detrimental to their health, their physique, and still more, to what may conveniently be called their psychological and mental outlook. It is stultifying to those children at the present time, and it is having a very disastrous effect upon them.

There is another aspect of the matter to which I want briefly to refer. It is the class aspect. I am sorry to raise a question of this sort at the present time, because I think the less said about these matters the better, but I think it is disastrous for the future interests of this country that you should have one class of children who are being in some cases exploited, and at any rate, in a great number of cases, worked almost till they drop, and another class of children who are not liable to those war penalties and consequences, and who grow up in a comparatively sheltered condition till the time when they have to join the Services, whereas their brothers and sisters—mainly their brothers—are exposed to this very onerous tax upon their intelligence and their constitution.

I am afraid that in a good many of these cases the parents are, in some sense, a consenting party on account of the wages which the children are able to bring in. I think that in some cases, although not in all, the parents find themselves with no other alternative. There are a good many families in my division whose normal wage-earner, the head of the family, is at present serving in His Majesty's Forces, and the financial position of those families is such, living in a big town at the present time, with all the economic disabilities which life in a great town imposes, that it has become necessary in many instances for the children to bring in as large wages as possible to supplement the financial position of the family. Social workers, quite unconnected with any party organisation, are coming to me and saying how anxious they feel, on the one hand, about the economic position of many families whose normal wage-earners are in the Forces, and, on the other hand, about the condition of the young people who have been forced into industry, not only for that reason, but also for the purpose of the national war effort, to work these long hours.

I appeal to the Parliamentary Secretary, who, I know, has a great interest in these matters, to see, first, that a proper survey is made of the situation and that the Government and the House have some proper knowledge of the hours that are being worked by these young people; secondly, that the hours are strictly limited for boys and girls from 16 to 18,

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Martin.]
and that for children under 16 they are limited to a very much smaller number than is at present the case—for children under 16 have no business to work anything like 40 hours, and certainly not more than 40 hours, and it is a public scandal that it should be so; and thirdly, that he should survey the whole situation from the point of view of the war effort and see whether we cannot demonstrate to the world that we can win the war without the assistance of young children in the struggle. If my hon. Friend will do that, he will make a contribution to our country at the present time, and, more than that, make a great contribution to the welfare of these children, who will become in a very short time the adult citizens of this country, and who are now being steadily disabled, a disablement which may affect succeeding generations.

Mr. Sutcliffe (Royton): I think all hon. Members agree that the hon. Member for Kilmarnock (Mr. Lindsay) has done a useful service in raising this important matter. Undoubtedly it is a retrograde step which the House is being asked to endorse. It was never thought, when the 44-hour week for juveniles was made the maximum under the Factory Act, that we should ever have to extend it to 52 hours. I want to ask one or two questions from the point of view of the cotton spinning industry. I am very sorry that this Order is to be applied to that industry. It has already been entitled to employ juveniles for 48 hours a week; the 44-hour week was extended to 48 hours, and therefore, that makes it all the more serious that it should be still further extended to 52 hours. I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary, who spent many years working in the cotton industry, whether there was no alternative to this Order. Has every other plan which would have enabled some alternative way to be found, been thoroughly explored? We must also have a definite assurance from my hon. Friend that this Order will apply only to the war period, and that after the war we shall go back to the old hours. Again, is not this Order largely due to the fact that the concentration was mismanaged, that too many mills were hurriedly closed and the men and women employed there were either sent to other work, such as munitions work, or were allowed to leave far too quickly, before the whole plan was worked out? This point has been raised before, but I think it is right to mention it again.

The cotton industry suddenly found itself, as it finds itself to-day, with insufficient employees to carry on, and one or two questions arise here. What has been the result of the urgent appeals made to women who have left the industry to return, and how many have returned and are now back in the industry? Is it thought likely that many more will be obtained in this way? What is being done for their children to enable them to be looked after in schools or other places? That is a vital point in encouraging women to return.

The greatest care must be taken of the health of these juveniles who are to work these extra hours. Anyone who has been in a cotton-spinning mill knows that it is certainly not the healthiest of places. The dust has been a source of ill-health to considerable numbers of operatives who have worked all their lives in the mills. To work in such an atmosphere is not conducive to the future health of these young people. Perhaps my hon. Friend can say how the extra hours are to be allocated over the week. Is it to be left to employees to arrange them in individual cases as they think best, or will some guidance be given? Will it be possible for these boys and girls to have a medical examination from time to time, to see whether they are fit to carry on the work, and will a certificate be granted so that they can return to their normal hours if they are found to be unfit?

Finally, I should like to ask why this Order, which was made on 5th February, was kept secret and was disclosed only at the beginning of this week? These are important questions, and I think some further information from the Parliamentary Secretary would be welcome.

Mr. Sorensen (Leyton, West): I am very glad indeed that this matter has been raised, and that many hon. Members have addressed their attention to it. I am glad that the Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour is here, and also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education. I should not be surprised if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education is becoming a little apprehensive lest some of the arguments used to justify this extension of hours of labour for young people might not be

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

brought to bear upon the children in our schools. Certainly, if it is alleged that the extension of hours of labour among young pottery workers and textile workers is necessary in the national interest and for war purposes, no great stretch of imagination is needed to argue that, in the same way, children at school should be released to be employed in the fields, the mines or factories. I am certain, however, that the Board of Education would resent and resist that, and would do their utmost to see that such a retrograde step was not taken no matter how powerful the arguments might be to show that it would be of some service in the war effort.

I hope that the Minister of Labour and the Joint Parliamentary Secretary will approach this question not merely from the standpoint of what is necessary for the prosecution of the war, but will also bear in mind the effective conquest of the peace, which has to come after the war. After all, these young people who are working long hours to-day, in the textile and pottery and other industries, will be the citizens who will have to repair the damage now being inflicted upon us. In a few years hence they will be called upon to exercise their civic intelligence and responsibility, and that is why I feel most earnestly that among all the tragic aspects of this war—and they are almost innumerable—there is none more tragic than the effect of the war on young people between 14 and 19 years of age. That is why, in one sense, I could welcome the registration of youth, although I do not understand why it should not be comprehensive and apply from the moment the child left school, and why we have not yet been told more clearly the actual purpose of this registration. Meanwhile, in regard to these young people in the pottery and textile and other industries, what we are doing is to breed in their minds a certain mood of cynicism regarding the present and future.

Reference has been made to fun fairs. Now and again I have looked in at these rather gloomy casinos which are somewhat characteristic of British life, because, instead of being openly announced as gambling dens, they call themselves by the very dubious, ambiguous and misleading term of " fun fair." I should like to ban these miserable shows to our young people. I admit that they provide a certain stimulus, but it is in the wrong direction. On the other hand, young people would not go there if they had not firmly focussed in their minds a false sense of values, often given them in these extraordinary places, and if there were inducements to them in other and better directions. That is why I hoped the purposes of the registration of youth would be effective, not merely from the pre-Service point of view, but for rightly building up the bodies, minds and spirits of these young people. To be perfectly frank, we know full well it has been largely a failure up to now. I believe that in many parts of London, certainly in my own part, less than 50 per cent. of those asked to attend interviews have actually turned up, and that of those who do turn up many are apparently indifferent. I can only assume that some of those who do not attend cannot find time to come. If we are to allow extensions of hours of labour and turn a blind eye to the breaking of the law, it may be that in the course of time, not merely in these two industries but in many other walks of life, young people will have extended hours imposed on them, and will be trained to expect those extended hours. In that case, whatever educational purpose there may be in the registration scheme will be completely nullified because of the lack of inducement available in the limited circumstances.

I share with many others apprehension at the increase in juvenile delinquency in many parts of the country. I believe it has doubled since the beginning of the war. This I trace to the same cause which leads some youths and maidens to haunt these disguised gambling dens. In other words, they become cynical. They are working long hours and, when they find time for recreation, they are completely disinclined to go in for healthy recreation. Either they have no opportunity or the inclination is not there. I worked in a factory for well over 60 hours a week as a youngster and many in the House have done the same thing. Throwing my mind back, I know that in spite of one's transitory desire, at the end of a long day's hard work the capacity to enter into a class, or to take up some healthy recreation has almost entirely gone.

From that standpoint, if we hope to win a worthy peace, if we desire the young people who will take our place in time to do so with greater eagerness, with untarnished vision and with greater ability

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Sorensen.]

than we have had to bring about a better world, it is surely worth our while to see that whatever else happens, we do not take wrongful advantage of the young people to-day. We must give them the amplest opportunity now to fulfil the duties we expect them to undertake to-morrow. From that standpoint alone, I hope most earnestly that the Joint Parliamentary Secretary will indicate that he intends to take sympathetic and drastic action. I do not censure the Minister of Labour himself so much as those industrial bodies on the men's side and the employers' side who have pressed forward this extension of hours. I wish there had been more representatives of the trade unions and the employers' organisations here, to hear what we have to say. They could no doubt make a strong case, but they could build up no sound case at all on the ground that if we are thinking of the real purpose of the war, we must work young people longer hours to make the world a healthier and finer place for those who will follow us. I appeal to the Minister to approach the matter from the standpoint of wanting to give the youth of to-day a chance to be a decent, healthy citizen to-morrow. Many of them will in due course be called up to join the Services, and some of them may not come back. We should, at least, say to the young people between 14 and 18, " Even under difficult circumstances we are going to do our very best for you. We cannot give you all you need, but we will do our best to guarantee that longer hours shall not be imposed upon you. We shall do our best to give you opportunities for mental and physical recreation, and in that way you will be able, when you join the Services, to have memories of a relatively fair and promising youth and you will emerge from those Services equipped in some measure with the power to make the world better than the world made by your fathers and mothers."

The Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour (Mr. Tomlinson): When I came to this Debate I was under the impression that we were to deal with one single aspect of the subject. I make no complaint because we have gone further afield, as it gives me the opportunity of expressing the Ministerial point of view with regard to actions which have been taken. It will be impossible to answer all the questions that have been asked as some of them deal with fundamental Government policy, nor could I in the allotted time deal with the question as to whether or not the concentration of industry in Lancashire has been carried out correctly, or could have been carried out otherwise, thus saving the necessity of increasing the hours of labour among young people. Neither I nor the Minister with whom I am working, would be prepared to take second place to anyone in the House in our desire to do the best that is possible for the young people of the country. I have spent far too much of my life seeking to improve those conditions, to be prepared to stay in a Government where the easy way out was taken at the expense of the children.

The first question raised was with regard to the Huddersfield education authority, and a statement regarding it which was quoted from the Press. It was a statement in general terms and, for that reason, before any inquiry could be made it was necessary to get a detailed statement. Although generalisations can be very effective from the point of view of speeches—I have used them myself on scores of occasions and shall probably do so again—from the standpoint of effective inquiry they are no use at all. We must have detailed information which can be checked, with regard to individuals and with regard to the cases that concern them. The Department got into touch with the Director of Education for Huddersfield. Inquiry has been made and, although the results are such as to cause us of necessity to make further inquiry, and, if need be, to take action in a certain direction, it does not lead to the view that one would have got by simply reading the Press report. The difficulty of checking the Director of Education's statement may be due, in some measure, to the fact that the boys themselves may have made statements which were perhaps not reliable. He further emphasises in his letter to the Department that he must not be regarded as making any charges against any of the firms concerned for whom these boys were working.

The boys and girls concerned were 250 of 17 years of age, and 58 of them were thought to be overworked. That is, roughly, 20 per cent. Only 40 are in employment which is regulated by the Factory Acts. It is difficult for the inspectors to go into details with regard to

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

youngsters employed in industries which are not covered by the Acts for which they are responsible. It may be necessary to have some further organisation and ways and means for checking the figures concerning the young people of the country such as have been called for to-day. The question we have to face is whether we have the time to carry out such an inquiry in the midst of a war. If there were time to do that, there would have been no justification for agreeing to an extension of hours for young people in the cotton industry.

Mr. Lindsay: Will my hon. Friend give any more details about the 58 cases he mentioned?

Mr. Tomlinson: I could give them, but I think it will serve the purpose better if I show them to my hon. Friend afterwards. The average is very much less than we were led to imagine was the case. It would appear as if the same mistake had been made here as is often made, in assuming that the man-hours revealed by the wage-packets are the actual hours worked. When an individual is paid time-and-a-half, he has worked an hour and a half according to his wage packet, and when he is paid double time he has worked two hours according to his wage packet. It is the hours actually worked about which I am concerned.

I would emphasise the necessity for getting particulars and for those particulars being sufficient to enable us to find the individual concerned. The hon. Gentleman who raised this matter sent us some particulars. He told us in an interesting Supplementary Question that three out of six youths he had interviewed in connection with the registration of youths were working very long hours, and he gave the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister particulars of the cases as well as he could. One of the consequences of the information being only partial was that it took days on the part of a very busy inspector to discover one of the youths. Inspectors are just as busy now under the Ministry of Labour as they were under the Home Office, and even busier, because, although there is more work, we have not been able to increase the number of inspectors proportionately. It had been suggested that this youth was working 70 to 80 hours. When we found him eventually, not at the place where he was supposed to have been working, but at another place in another town, it was discovered that the actual hours worked were 55. I think 55 is too long, but there is a vast difference between 55 and something over 70. Therefore, I ask that we should be given information on which we can get down to the inquiries. If there is something illegal going on, I am certain that my right hon. Friend the Minister, under whom I am pleased to work, will be prepared to put it right immediately.

The question of the increase of the young people employed has been raised. I wish that the House could get into the habit of distinguishing between juveniles and young people. That is not easy. It took me a few years to separate them in my mind. Often when young people are being spoken about it is juveniles that are being thought of, and *vice versa*. The distinction is necessary. The only young people who have been given the onerous duty of working up to 52 hours a week are in the textile and pottery trades. I would remind the House that before the war began, and after these restrictions on hours had been introduced, both the textile trade and the pottery trade came to this House and got the Order extended in order that they might work 48 hours. They had convinced the House, and convinced those who were responsible for administering the Order, that they were entitled to work the children for 48 hours. [HON. MEMBERS: "Children?"] They are juveniles from 14 to 16 and they are young people between 16 and 18. I opposed that Order because I believed then, as I still believe, that it should have been possible so to reorganise the work that the extra production could have been got without that increase of hours. But that reorganisation would have been taking place in peace time. Are we in a position to say that now, in the midst of war, is the time to begin to disorganise, if you like, the whole trade in order to reorganise it?

An hon. Member asked whether it was essential that these young people should be allowed to work these hours. I will deal first with the cotton trade, because I know the cotton mills and I know the difference between a young person working the 48 hours which were allowed and the 52 which have been granted under this Order. It is a difference of four

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Tomlinson.]

hours a week—four hours too many. I believe that 48 hours are too long for young people. But we are face to face with this position, that with the cotton trade organised as it is, with its machinery as it is to-day, those young people are just as valuable from the standpoint of production as are the elder people in the trade. In a spinning mill you might as well not have the older people working these hours, if you are not going to let the "doffer" work them, and the "doffer" is the young person.

The question which I have to ask and which the Minister has to ask is, What is necessary in the way of cotton for war purposes? We are down to war purposes, we have very much less than we require for the very purpose of fighting the war and meeting the requirements of our people. The Minister has to decide whether or not it is more detrimental for these young people to work the extra four hours than for us to be short of cotton for the winning of the war. In the view of some people that may be putting it in an extravagant form. To me, the question is this: What is the position of these children under a 52-hour week, with the Ministry of Labour watching so that the hours can be reduced at the first opportunity—what is the difference between 52 hours a week and victory or the possibility of our coming under Hitler? That may not be the question and I may be wrong, but if it is not the question I have been fooled.

All the speeches we have had about austerity in living and the necessity of getting on with the job either mean something or mean nothing. Either we are in danger or we are not. If we are in danger, it seems to me that when we are considering the position of the cotton operative or the pottery operative the question has to be weighed in the light of what would be the position if this extension were refused. I am facing these questions as a realist, but at the same time as an idealist, being just as much concerned about these children in the cotton mills as any Member of this House. In peace-time conditions, I would have cut off my right hand rather than sign that, just as in peace I would have gone to any extent rather than be a party to the shedding of blood. When things become necessities, they have to be viewed in the light of necessities, and the desires of some of us—things that we desire most ardently—have sometimes to be set aside.

It was suggested that the hours were creeping up from 48 to 60 or 70 in the textile and pottery trades. Those are the only two trades in which allowance has been made for an extension of hours. As I have already indicated, they were the only two trades which asked that the hours should be extended before the war began, because they were dependent to some extent upon young people. Just as in the textile industry, we took the views of the leaders of the operatives on the trade union side as well as of the employers, and agreed to what had been agreed to between them, so, in the pottery industry, we did the same thing, but only after inquiry had been made and we were convinced that it was the only way out for the time being. My hon. Friend asked me whether, if we had concentrated the industry in a different way, we could have avoided utilising the services of these children in the cotton spinning industry. I believe we could, but when we concentrated the cotton industry we were working on information which gave us the impression that we might be in danger of being unable to employ even the 50 per cent. upon which we had concentrated. If we had lost the Battle of the Atlantic we should have stood, logically, in an unanswerable position.

I do not mind being put in the position where hon. Members can score debating points, because we happened to win the Battle of the Atlantic, and to have got more cotton across to this country than we dreamed it might be possible to get. The position has changed so often in the conditions of the war, and as regards the workers in the war, that we have been compelled to look at these things, time and time again, in the light of the changed situation. What is true of pottery and cotton is true of the whole of the industries in which we are engaged. I am told that one of the troubles of our young people is not only that they have to work long hours but that a long time is taken in travelling to and fro. That is true, but it applies not only to our young people. I do not like it to apply to them, but I like it even less in regard to our womenfolk. It is happening because of the way in which our industries have been built up and organised, and are having to be carried on for war purposes.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

It is said that many young people cannot join organisations because they are working long hours. That has been provided for. I wish I could feel that the majority of our young people were not joining organisations because they were working long hours; I should be a good deal easier in mind if I could think that that was the primary reason.

Mr. Lindsay: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the young people who, in my experience, have come forward, have given that reason——

Mr. Tomlinson: My point is that it has been suggested that young people are not joining organisations, and a reason is said to be that they are working long hours——

Mr. Lindsay: Exactly. I want to make the point that they did not join organisations in the past not because of hours or anything like that, but merely because the organisations did not exist. There were only evening classes, and the young people did not want to go there. What is wrong at the present moment is that they do want to join, but cannot because of the long hours.

It being the hour appointed for the interruption of Business, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That this House do now adjourn."—[*Major Sir James Edmondson.*]

Mr. Tomlinson: I am not suggesting that there are not cases in which that is true, but I am pointing out that registration took place for the purpose of utilising our young people, or seeing if they could be utilised, among other things for doing something that would assist towards the war effort or using their leisure time to the best advantage. That was at the back of everybody's mind. The point I want the House to see is this: If the reason why many of our young people are not prepared to join was this, I should be very well satisfied. I believe that it is because of other tendencies that we are not getting the best out of our youth in some directions.

Mr. Sorensen: It is one reason, the hon. Gentleman will admit.

Mr. Tomlinson: Yes, and it is a reason that is accepted. I would go further, and say that if they are working long hours and are engaged on Government work or work for the prosecution of the war, they are not expected to join these organisations. They are already doing the very work which we were asking that they should be utilised to do, and God forbid that a lad should be taken away from work and compelled to join. I was amazed at a suggestion which came to me recently that a lad who is working 12 hours a day and has three hours off in the middle of the day should be given some physical exercises in the middle of the day. It seems to me that he should be provided with a bed, if he cannot get home, rather than be given physical instruction. I want us to treat these young people as human beings, and I want us to treat them, at the same time, as human beings existing in the midst of war. Of course, war is not good for young folks, it is not good for old folks either. Of course, it will interfere with their habits; it has interfered with their habits. The last time I had to speak on this question it was because they were said to be earning too much money, and I am glad that this other aspect of it has come to the front, and that we are now concerned about their physical well-being.

In order that we might know exactly what is happening—and nobody wants to score debating points on these questions; at least I hope not—only within this last week we have been in touch with the Board of Education, and have asked particularly that we should be apprised of any cases in which it was found that boys or girls were being over-worked, in order that we might inquire into them. Many industries are not covered by the Factory Acts, and many of the long hours which have been referred to are covered by the local authority, so that administration is difficult. I know it would be better if we had Acts to cover them all and could deal with them in that way. But again I would ask: Have we time in the midst of a war to stop and devise the best ways and means of carrying out these things? I am all in favour of them, and I believe the Minister is in favour of them, but the question of priorities comes in here as in other things, and the first priority, to me at any rate, is the winning of the war. I am just as concerned about winning the peace as anybody else.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

[Mr. Tomlinson.]

Somebody has suggested that the reason this was brought in was that the young people might be in amusement parks. The Minister of Labour has no responsibility for amusement parks unless there is somebody looking after them who can be called up, in which case I assure you we should be delighted to put them either into useful war work or the Services. It has also been suggested that the amusement parks were connected with the increase of adolescent crime. I should not be surprised if there was something in it. They may have been found to be associated in some way with the young people who might go wrong, but I do not think that if they are spending too much time in amusement parks, it can be attributed to the fact that they are working too long. If they are spending time in amusement parks, it cannot be because they are working all the hours God sends. Therefore, the answer to the argument of too long hours might be to open more amusement parks.

What I would like to say, and I say it because of what the hon. Member for Central Leeds (Mr. Denman) said, is that winning the war is the first essential. I believe that everybody would subscribe to that. I would not like it to be thought that the Minister of Labour was prepared to put the bigger task of winning the war upon the young folk. I would not like it to be thought for a moment that he had agreed, or that our inspectors had ever suggested, that these extensions should take place until the case had been proved up to the hilt. Someone said that they could not connect the pottery trade and the war. Among other things, in order to fight the war we have had to open a good many canteens. If you can associate the canteens and the pottery trade, you can associate the pottery trade with the war. I do not want to be charged with having been responsible for a lack of the wherewithal to eat our meals, and the position has been sufficiently serious for it to be possible to reach a position of that kind. The same thing applies with regard to cotton.

One assurance I can give; I think it is the only assurance I need give and the only assurance you would ask for. Not only do we expect that the inspectors will do their duty to the best of their ability —they are always ready and willing to do it—but wherever information can be supplied, particularly detailed information, it helps, at any rate, to centralise the problem before it gets out of hand. In that sense any detailed particulars that are sent along would be and will be inquired into. Further, where it has been found necessary, for the time being, to extend hours in order that we might get production in that particular place at that particular time, the Minister, at the first opportunity, would remove the Order that has been given immediately the demand had been met.

I was asked a question with regard to what was the position in Lancashire. As my hon. Friend knows, I cannot answer all the questions with regard to concentration and the difficulties that have arisen as a consequence of it. I can say that the increase of these hours meant an increase of 6½ per cent. in the production of cotton yarn, which is in very short supply. I am not saying that this is entirely due to the young people, but I am saying that it would be a good deal less if they had not been allowed to work those hours. When the cotton yarn is made into bandages and other things essential to the war and the daily life of the people, I think we can be given credit for having looked at the subject from the standpoint of what is best for all. Do not forget it may be the fact that the children have been working in co-operation and in conjunction with their elders, which has been one of the reasons for bringing down the hours of the elders. I am sure that is true about the cotton industry.

About the pottery industry I cannot speak with any confidence. If, as a result of the changes now taking place, it is found possible to reduce the hours for the young people, or better still, do away with overtime by bringing into employment people from other sources, I am quite certain that the Minister will be the first person to rejoice because the Order can be revoked.

SIR ALEXANDER GIBB AND PARTNERS.

Mr. Stokes (Ipswich): I have given notice to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works and Buildings to raise a matter concerning the appointment of Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners, and particularly of a Mr. Beaver, a member of that firm, to a position of responsibility in the Ministry of Works and Buildings. I

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

have not so much time at my disposal as I had hoped to have; therefore, I must endeavour to compress what I have to say. Whatever may have been written and said elsewhere, I do not make any imputation of dishonesty against any of the persons mentioned. I am raising this as a matter of principle, as to whether it is right and proper that a Ministry should, first of all, take into their employment a partner from a recognised firm of consulting engineers, and then pass back through the said firm a substantial number of contracts, having first, as I would put it, milked the partnership presumably of the brains of their business.

Mr. Simmonds (Birmingham, Duddeston): In the light of what my hon. Friend says, might I remind him of a Question put last week by the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Mr. R. Morgan) to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works and Buildings, in reply to which the Minister stated that no new contracts have been placed with Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners by the Ministry since a member of the firm became Director-General at the Ministry?

Mr. Stokes: If my hon. Friend will await what I have to say, he will see what I am getting at. It has nothing to do with the business, because if this firm were not employed by the Ministry of Works and Buildings, it would apply to the Ministry of Supply, where the same irregularity was going on for some months, through the same business. It seems to me wrong to take the brains out of a business first, and then to employ the business for the purpose of administering a large number of civil engineering contracts. I raised another issue, as to whether the person taken is competent for the job of director-general. I know nothing about him personally, but, so far as I know, his engineering experience is very little. He is a partner in the firm, but it was only in 1940 that he became a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers. If this person is so qualified, and if this engineering consulting firm are so capable of doing their job, can my hon. Friend explain why one of the factories, which I shall not identify for security reasons, but which he will speedily recognise, was estimated to cost £5,000,000, but actually cost something over £10,000,000? There is another case of a hostel in the same neighbourhood which was estimated to cost £95,000, and actually cost £234,000. As the hostel is intended for only 1,000 people, the cost per head works out at £234, which the House will agree compares most unfavourably with the cost of the London County Council's White City buildings—of a permanent, not a temporary, nature—the cost of which works out at £150 a head.

Mr. Silkin (Peckham): My hon. Friend ought to remember that the White City provided no amenities, only rooms.

Mr. Stokes: It is all right; I am not attacking the L.C.C. My hon. Friend is only wasting my time. I do not propose to give way any more. My point is to call attention to the amount of fees paid to Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners. They amount to £15,000 per annum. At the Ministry of Supply, at the present moment, there are four competent civil engineering firms used as consultants, and the total fees distributed among them are £5,000. That is something of the order of £1,250 each. Why should there be that great differentiation? That is only a very small part of the sums in question. The Ministry of Works and Buildings, from December, 1940, to March, 1942, according to my hon. Friend, has had work to the tune of £8,700,000 carried out through this firm, and the fees paid on top of that have been £358,000. I know that he will say that it has not all gone into their pockets and that they have to employ all sorts of other people, but it is said in the trade that as much as 30 per cent. of the amount paid actually goes to that firm. If you add up the total of fees and contracts placed with this firm for the period in question, it comes to something over £18,000,000 worth of contracts, for which a fee of £810,000 has been paid.

I will not go into the problem of the multiple sub-letting of contracts, of which I have one or two glaring examples, but I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to answer whether Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners are entitled to call themselves agents for the Ministry of Works and Buildings. It is put on their letter heading and seems to put them in a most unfortunate position, and it causes a great deal of dissatisfaction and complaint among people in the civil engineering profession. It is all the more unfortunate that Mr. Beaver was a partner of that firm, although my hon. Friend now tells

Archivo Histórico Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina

[Mr. Stokes.]

me that he is a sleeping partner. I would ask my hon. Friend, who no doubt knows as much about the job as I do. When does a sleeping partner sleep or when does he cease to have any interest in the financial results of the business? I understand a sleeping partner to be a person who takes no active part in the business but shares in the results and stands to benefit very enormously from the amount earned by the firm. That is the common understanding.

There is another question, and a very serious one, which I wish to put to my hon. Friend. At the time that the Ministry of Works and Buildings first started in 1940, I believe that Mr. Beaver was Director of Building Materials at the Ministry, but was also at that time an active sleeping or sleeping active partner in Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners. When the question of the development of a certain big works in the West country, particulars of which I will pass across the Table to my hon. Friend if he does not recognise it, was under consideration, Mr. Beaver gave an assurance that the Ministry of Works and Buildings had a sufficient combined staff capable of carrying out this big development estimated to cost something like £20,000,000. What happened? It was questioned by competent people present who said they were certain there was not sufficient staff at the Ministry of Works and Buildings and asked that they should employ other people. The whole matter was handed out by the Ministry of Works and Buildings to Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners to handle for them because they had not sufficient staff to do the job. That casts a very great reflection on the whole administration of the Ministry of Works and Buildings.

I have one or two suggestions to make. It is time they got rid, as our American friends across the Atlantic have done, of the dollar-a-year man. We do not want people in Ministries who are giving their services and raking in the swag elsewhere for services rendered without their knowing what they are being paid. If you take men on the staff, you should pay them and make them completely unaffected by interests outside. In the view of competent people—my hon. Friend may laugh, but I probably know as much about this thing as he does.

Mr. Simmonds: All competent people think that too.

Mr. Stokes: At any rate, the civil engineering profession recognise that the Director-General should be not merely a capable administrator but somebody who really understands, from A to Z, the civil engineering profession. Probably the best man for the job would be one of the leading men in the contracting trade. Again, you would not have to have him placing contracts through his own firm. They would have to be divorced from operating under him, and he would have to dissociate himself entirely from any benefit which was derived from Government Departments.

A third point that I want to make is that just as you employ policemen to prevent ordinary crime in the streets, so should you employ competent accountants to prevent crime inside Ministries. I suggest to my hon. Friend that it would be a very good thing if we could have a committee formed from the societies of chartered and incorporated accountants to supervise the appointment of competent accountants inside the Ministries—men who really can detect the kind of thing which we suspect is going on. There has been a great deal of feeling in the country about this matter and in the profession. Indeed, civil engineers have set up a committee to look into it, and this committee is sitting now. I consider I am not overstating the case in saying that it would be in the public interest, and would give great public satisfaction, if a public inquiry was instituted into the whole proceedings.

The Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works and Buildings (Mr. Hicks): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Stokes) for the way in which he has submitted his case regarding certain phases of activity in my Ministry in connection with the people whom the Department employs. On many occasions questions have been asked of me in the House about the people whom the Department employs in wartime. However unpleasantly the word "war" may jar on the ears of some people, it must be remembered that we are at war and if the Government need the temporary assistance of individuals from private firms, are we then to say that such firms must no longer have any

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

employment from a Government Department? The question my hon. Friend has raised is one of principle. I would like to say at the outset that my Ministry has handed over only one job to Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners since the Ministry was established, and that was before the present Director-General became Director-General.

Mr. Stokes: But he was Director Building Materials.

Mr. Hicks: That has nothing at all to do with contracts. As I have stated in this House, from the moment he became attached to the Ministry of Works and Buildings he was no longer an active partner in any shape or form in the firm of Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners.

Mr. Austin Hopkinson (**Mossley**): But he is still a partner.

Mr. Hicks: He is no longer an active member.

Mr. Hopkinson: But he is still an active partner.

Mr. Hicks: I think my hon. Friend would be right, but since that time I think he has voluntarily resigned from being a partner.

Mr. Hopkinson: On what date did he resign?

Mr. Hicks: I have not the exact date, but I am informed that he has resigned his partnership in the firm. I wanted to make it perfectly clear that I have it on his assurance, and on the assurance of everyone from whom I tried to get the information, that ever since he has been associated with the Ministry of Works and Buildings he has not been available for consultation or been in any sense an active member of the firm of Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners. [*Interruption.*] We must concede that there are some honest people in this world; otherwise, how can the hon. Member believe what I say, or I believe what he says?

Mr. Hopkinson: Did the Minister ask this gentleman whether he was receiving any remuneration or share of profits from his firm during that period?

Mr. Hicks: I did not ask him that, but I am pretty sure he was receiving a share of the profits of the firm. He was not being paid by my Ministry at the time, and if he did not get anything from somewhere, he looked very well on nothing. I am fairly sure he was receiving some profits from the firm. Let me say that the bulk of the work about which the question has been asked with regard to the terms of the agreement with Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners was placed by the Ministry of Supply, and the Ministry of Supply passed such work over to the Ministry of Works and Buildings, together with the general commitments that were entered into by the firm of Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners. It would be relatively easy, if I had the time, to show that, as far as the economic arrangement was concerned, it has been definitely to the benefit of the country and the Government. It has been cheap. The principle under which it has been worked may not commend itself to some, but I will tell my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that the Select Committee on National Expenditure have asked for a report, that the report is now before them, and that they are now examining this matter. Therefore, perhaps my hon. Friend will not ask me to reveal too many details with regard to the matter. However, the only job that was given to the firm of Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners, since Mr. Beaver has been a member of the Ministry, but before he was Director-General, is the one in the West Country mentioned by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Stokes: £20,000,000.

Mr. Hicks: If the hon. Member reduced that amount by half and then took quite a big sum from the half, he would be near it. The figure he gives is a very imaginative one. It is, and will be, much below half that figure. In that case, the chairman of the Institute of Civil Engineers was asked—as we have been associated all the time with the organisations of the industry—to give an opinion, to help us and guide us in the big programme which had to be carried out. In this instance, it was the same as happens with the Royal Institute of British Architects. The Institute of Civil Engineers was asked if they were willing to nominate a firm, or firms, that the Ministry might consider, and after consultation with the profession and with their organisation, they recommended this firm, and it was accepted by the Ministry.

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Mr. Stokes: This firm?

Mr. Hicks: The Ministry first of all solicited the opinion of the industry and their organisation and asked them to nominate a firm, or firms, and from that source came this particular recommendation. The question of men giving their services voluntarily or being paid is one which must be left to the individual. I can only say that those for whom I have answered in the House from time to time have given their full-time services. They are directly under my Ministry, and they are giving their full-time services, and if they do it voluntarily, I am not able to interfere. It might be, perhaps, a better thing if they became Civil servants. I do not know how that would affect their honesty; it might be that it would not be improved. But that is not the point. In regard to the question of accountancy, let me say that the Ministry, as soon as ever they had this firm brought under control in any shape or form, did have a guarantee that they would be able to examine those accounts, and they do examine them. Every statement of every wage that is paid to any person working for this firm is submitted to my Ministry and checked by competent accountants in order that we may check up the weekly and monthly accounts, and there have been reductions and alterations in staff.

It being the hour appointed for the Adjournment of the House, Mr. SPEAKER *adjourned the House, without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Archivo Histórico
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto
Argentina

Members who wish to have the Daily Report of the Debates forwarded to them should give notice at the Vote Office.

The Bound Volumes will also be sent to Members who similarly express their desire to have them. For these a charge will be made varying according to the size of the Volume.

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in this Report, and *the copy containing the corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons*

not later than

Wednesday, 25th March, 1942

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of Publication), on application to the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained.

The House of Commons Official Report may be purchased directly from H.M. Stationery Office at the following addresses:

York House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2; 120, George Street, Edinburgh 2; 39–41, King Street, Manchester 2; 1, St. Andrew's Crescent, Cardiff; 80 Chichester Street, Belfast;
or through any bookseller.