

ORDERS OF THE DAY.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (FINANCIAL PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) [MONEY].

Resolution reported,

" That for the purposes of any Act of the present Session to extend the third fixed grant period under the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1929, and to make provision for the stabilisation of Supplementary Exchequer Grants under the said Act and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of moneys provided by Parliament of any increase in the sums so payable which is attributable:—

(a) to the extension of the said period until such date as Parliament may hereafter determine; and

(b) to the stabilisation for the term of the extension of the said period of Supplementary Exchequer Grants under the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1929."

Resolution agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (FINANCIAL PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL.

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

INDIA AND BURMA (POSTPONE-MENT OF ELECTIONS) BILL [*Lords*].

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, " That the Bill be now read a Second time."

Mr. Garro Jones (Aberdeen, North): Would the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for India tell the House a little about this Bill? I think that some of my hon. Friends on this side will desire to say a few words upon it.

The Secretary of State for India and Burma (Mr. Amery): The object of this Bill, for the Second Reading of which I am asking the approval of the House, is to extend for the duration of the war and for 12 months afterwards the maximum life of the House of Representatives in Burma and of the Legislative Assemblies in the eleven Provinces of India. The extension is permissive. There is nothing to prevent elections being held in any or all of these cases, if the situation at any

time makes that desirable. Under existing constitutional provisions contained in Section 18 (4) of the Government of Burma Act and in Section 61 (2) of the Government of India Act, these legislative bodies have a maximum life of five years. That period expires, in the case of the Burma House of Representatives, in February, 1942, and in the case of five Indian Provinces, namely, Assam, Bengal, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and the Punjab, in April, 1942, and in the six other Provinces, in July, 1942. The effect of the Bill is to extend the maximum permissible life of these legislative bodies from five years to a period expiring 12 months after the end of the war.

The Bill leaves intact the existing discretionary powers of the Governors to dissolve the legislatures under Section 62 (2) of the Government of India Act and under Section 18 (2) of the Government of Burma Act. The House will not take it that the passage of the Bill necessarily means that elections will not be held at some earlier date. It was, however, thought desirable to provide for the longest period that might possibly be required. It may be asked why a period of 12 months after the conclusion of the war is provided for in the Bill. It was unanimously agreed by those who were taken into consultation that, in view of the fact that elections could only conveniently be held in the cold weather season, and as we cannot, of course, know at what period of the year the war may come to an end, it would be desirable to provide for the possibility of a 12 months' extension.

As far as India is concerned, the matter has been very fully discussed between the Governor-General and the Governors concerned and the conclusion to which they have come is that it would not be desirable to hold elections at present. We here have come to the conclusion that the distractions and excitement of an election campaign would hardly be conducive to the success of the war effort and the same, I think, applies in India, where an election also would throw a very heavy strain on the hard-pressed administrative and public services. Moreover, communal feeling is, unfortunately, running pretty high in some parts of India at present and might well be seriously aggravated by election meetings and speeches. In certain Provinces there is the further feature that

the Constitution is in suspense, owing to the withdrawal of the Congress Ministries and Members. I think it would be little less than farcical, at any rate so long as that position continues, if elections were held merely in order to afford an opportunity for ventilating Mr. Gandhi's policy of negotiation without any prospect of a return to constitutional government after the election.

The House will note that the Bill does not apply to the Indian Central Legislature. That is because the life of the Central Legislature can be extended by the Governor-General under Section 63 (D) of the Ninth Schedule to the Government of India Act, without further Parliamentary authority and, in fact, the Governor-General recently did extend the life of both Chambers of the Central Legislature until October next year. There are, of course, as the House is aware, Upper Houses in some Provinces, but they are continuing bodies, elected every three years and the next elections in their case are not until 1943. In any case, they affect so limited a constituency as not to make necessary any special provision for the possibility that the war might extend beyond that date.

In the case of Burma, the maximum life of the Senate is seven years. Therefore we consider that that also need not come into the picture. I may add that, in the case of Burma, elections would in the ordinary course have been held this Autumn but the uncertainty of the situation in the Far East has made postponement desirable and, I think, even necessary. The House will also realise that if the present legislature were dissolved and if circumstances arose which made the orderly holding of an election impossible, Burma might find itself altogether without a legislature. Accordingly, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, in consultation with the Premier of Burma, has decided that elections should be postponed for the present. It may interest the House to know that the Premier of Burma is shortly coming to this country on a mission of good-will. We hope to receive him some time about the middle of next month. He will be assured of a cordial welcome and will have opportunities of making many personal contacts. He will be able to tell us something of Burma's own war effort, as well as of her other problems and to learn something at first-hand of our war

effort and of the wider situation in the war. I commend the Bill to the House and I hope it may be possible, in view of the desirability of clearing up the situation in India, to take all its further stages also at this Sitting.

Mr. Ammon (Camberwell, North): I am sure the House will join with the right hon. Gentleman in expressing satisfaction at the coming visit to this country of the Premier of Burma. I do not propose to take up much time in discussing the Measure which he has submitted or in putting forward objections to it. One has to face the situation as one finds it but it may be permissible, on this occasion, to express regret that the relations at present between India and the Home Government are not more cordial and to regret that it is not possible to make more use of the great arsenal of productive power which exists there and to secure a more hearty co-operation from India in the war effort. But apart from those considerations, and having regard to the exigencies of the war, it would appear that the suspension of elections in the Provinces is, undoubtedly, a step which will have to be taken. It is not wholly due to that but rather to the disturbance that the right hon. Gentleman has referred to and the distraction which obtains in some of these Provinces. That is a pity, all the more so because it might have been prevented had we acted a little more wisely when we first entered the war and approached them in a proper way. I cannot see that any good purpose will be served by labouring the point and discussing the Bill, which, after all, can hardly be contentious, and which we must agree is simply putting them broadly on the same line that we have assumed ourselves in present circumstances.

Earl Winterton (Horsham and Worthington): I do not wish to make a speech, but I want to enter one very strong caveat against what the hon. Gentleman has just said. There is no evidence whatever that the unfortunate political situation in India has had the slightest effect either upon recruiting for the Indian Army or upon the very remarkable improvement in the munitions situation. I am sorry to have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I do not think he is accurate in that. Otherwise I entirely agree with all that he has said. It would be unfortunate if that went out to India, without being controverted,

[Earl Winterton.]
from an hon. Gentleman occupying a responsible position and very well known in India. I should like to pay tribute to what is being done by the magnificent courage of the people in joining the Indian Army and the very considerable and growing munitions production.

Mr. Silverman (Nelson and Colne): I am not in any sense of the word an expert upon Indian affairs, and I make a contribution to this Debate with a good deal of trepidation on that account, and with a little more trepidation in that I find myself in such fundamental disagreement with what has so far been said. My only apology for troubling the House with an opinion which is so inexpert, and so different from those which have been expressed by those who no doubt understand the situation so much better than I do, is that, after all, we are living in very critical, one might say revolutionary times, and it seems to me that when the experts have failed so miserably and lamentably as they seem to have done in the situation which they have produced it is perhaps excusable if some of us who have opinions for which we claim no expertise or instruction may occasionally venture to offer them.

The Noble Lord said there was no evidence at all that the lamentable state of affairs between this country and India had had an adverse effect either upon recruiting or upon the industrial war effort in India. I do not know what evidence he seeks. Surely he would be among the last to contend that the military or industrial war effort was independent of morale, or that morale was totally and completely independent from the feeling in the mind of the people as to whether the war was being fought for objects which had any meaning or reality for them. I do not profess to advance an opinion on the subject, but everyone seems to agree that there is a most unfortunate situation prevailing in India. I listen to all the experts with the respect that they deserve, but I know none of them who would say that the position was in the least satisfactory or that the Indian people themselves were satisfied either with the present position of affairs or with the pronouncements which have been made from time to time as to the future. Indeed, if I understood it aright, the right hon. Gentleman's speech and his Measure are a confession of that. He said we could

not have elections now; feeling is running too high. What a reason for not holding an election under a democratic Constitution that feeling is running too high.

Mr. Amery: Communal feeling.

Mr. Silverman: Does it matter? Does the right hon. Gentleman suggest that communal feeling is different from Indian feeling?

Mr. Amery: Communal feeling between one community and another—not feeling against this country.

Mr. Silverman: I do not know what would have happened in Liverpool, where I was born, where I saw feeling much bitterer than it is in India, if the Executive in those days had stepped in and said, "You feel these things altogether too deeply. You shall not be allowed to express them at the ballot box or in speeches during an election." I think it is a very strange reason for not holding an election that feeling is running too high. And what feeling? If feeling were running very high in favour of the policy of the Government of India, would the right hon. Gentleman have thought that a reason for not holding an election? No. He would have had an election at the earliest possible moment. He would not have waited until the end of the statutory period, but he or the local Governor would have exercised his powers under the Statute to dissolve the Legislative Assembly and have an election earlier than by Statute he need, in order to demonstrate that the people who were making difficulties, who were causing obstruction, who were preventing the attempt to make the new Constitution work, had not the backing of the Indian people and were really an obstructive, recalcitrant minority, representing no one. When the right hon. Gentleman said we cannot hold elections because feeling is running too high, his sentence was incomplete. He meant, "We cannot hold elections because feeling is running too high against the Government." That is all it can mean. If the position had been that all these bodies did not represent Indian opinion and that the Government really represented, in the difficulties of the moment, what the Indian people, at any rate for the time being, desired to be done, these elections would not have been postponed. The argument will not stand examination.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Camberwell (Mr. Ammon) said that, after all, the effect of the Bill is merely to apply to India what we have applied to ourselves. There is a superficial sense in which that is true. Just as this Parliament exhausted its mandate a year ago and by its own act extended the period of its representation, so this Bill would have a corresponding effect in India, but when you have stated that similarity, you have stated the whole similarity. Look at the difference. It was this House that decided to prolong its own life. Some day all Members will have to go back to their constituencies and justify, if we can, to those who sent us here not merely all the things we have done or attempted to do or left undone during the period in which we represented or misrepresented them in this House, but this very act of prolonging the representation which was entrusted to us in 1935. That is not the case here. If the Legislative Assemblies in India had been asked to prolong their own mandate, there would have been a parallel to what took place in this House. This Bill is not the act of a democratically elected Legislative Assembly prolonging its own existence and knowing it will have to answer for that fact to the peoples who elected it. It is an act of direct and personal rule, an act of autocracy, an act of dictatorship. It is an act to prevent the Indian people from expressing their views at the time when the Statute gave them the right to express them, and not the act of the Legislative Assemblies in India.

This Bill does not postpone elections until communal feeling has died down; it postpones them until 12 months after the conclusion of the war. That is surely in direct conflict with the reason adduced in support of it by the right hon. Gentleman, because the communal feeling, if it exists, was not because of the war and will not be ended by the war. The present state of political affairs in India, which everybody agrees to be unsatisfactory, will presumably some day have to be brought to an end. I could understand, although I do not think I would accept, an argument that until the political *impasse* both between India and this country and between various bodies in India had been resolved the elections ought not to take place. That argument, however, cannot fairly be advanced in support of a Bill

that has nothing to do with any attempt to bring the political *impasse* to an end. The right hon. Gentleman gave us no prospect that the Government were to do or to say anything to bring the *impasse* to an end. The war might end to-morrow or in 10 years' time, and the situation in India would remain as it is unless something were done by the Government to give the Indian people the right to govern themselves. The Prime Minister, in conjunction with the President of the United States, has committed this country to certain propositions, one of which is a pledge to give to every country the right to choose the Government it desires. If that was said to India, it would go a long way, if accompanied by positive acts showing the sincerity of the assertion, towards removing the difficulties which might in some people's minds prevent elections from taking place.

The Prime Minister was asked yesterday how far that declaration was intended to govern the Indian situation. He made a reply which must have brought deeper despair and gloom into the heart of every Indian striving patriotically for his country and for better understanding between his country and ourselves. Contrast that with what the Prime Minister had to say about Syria. Syria is not ours, and I suppose that it was easier for the Prime Minister to apply his declaration to territories for which we have no responsibility. He said that the special rights of the French in Syria were to be recognised and protected, but there was to be Syrian independence. What is more, he said that that was not to be deferred until after the war but was to begin now. Such a statement, omitting the word "Syria" and substituting the word "India," might render this Bill unnecessary.

I apprehend that I am in a small minority, but I hope that there are those who share my view and that those with greater knowledge of Indian questions than I can claim will not think that the statements I have been making are entirely irrelevant or unhelpful. I would appeal to the right hon. Gentleman not to be content with this autocratic act at this moment. Can he say nothing to India except, "Because there is a high tide of feeling against this Government, you shall not be allowed to express it at elections"? Is he satisfied, as the Noble Lord was, that we are getting from India

[Mr. Silverman.] all the contribution that we might get if happier political relations existed? I am not satisfied of that, and I feel sure that he is not satisfied. I do not like to put it on this ground. If it is right for India to have liberty, it is right for her to have it whatever the effect may be on the war situation. It ought not to be qualified in that way, but if the truth be, as I believe it to be, that the right and just solution of this question would not only be an act of justice done now shining bright in a dark world, but would also arouse such a high degree of enthusiasm among Indians as to bring them wholeheartedly into the fight which we are waging as much for them as for us, would it not be worth while to adopt it?

Is it an act of statesmanship to stand back and say, "Until you agree with us, you shall not be heard at all"? Hitler can do that in Germany, in Austria, in France and in Italy. He can do it all over the world. Is it enough for us to do that? The right hon. Gentleman has a great opportunity to show that he is more than an able and efficient administrator, to show that he is also a high Imperial statesman seeing things in pristine importance divorced from the local and particular and temporary. He has an opportunity to make a declaration and to do something which would end a conflict which all good Indians and all good British citizens deplore. What does he do in that situation? He commits another act of direct and personal rule, which is a denial of democracy and another glorification of autocracy, and I cannot agree with those who think that this House ought to accept his action without protest, complaint or comment, as though it were the most natural and ordinary thing in the world, a mere commonplace in the end for democracy.

Sir Stanley Reed (Aylesbury): I think anybody who understands anything about the position in India, or has any knowledge of India, will agree that the statement made by the Noble Lord the Member for Horsham and Worthing (Earl Winterton) was a strict and literal truth. All those who have studied this question will agree that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no option but to bring in this Measure. For the reasons he has given, and many others, it must be patent to anybody who has any know-

ledge at all of the situation that this Measure was necessary in almost any circumstances in India and doubly necessary because of the circumstances of the day. When listening to the remarks of the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. Silverman), I could not help asking myself whether, in the last 18 months, he has ever listened to a single one of the statements made by the Secretary of State for India, whether he has ever read any news of any sort from any part of India, and whether he has ever perused any of the White Papers and other official documents relating to India, because, if he has, I cannot conceive that any man of average intelligence would have drawn the conclusions from those statements and facts which he has drawn and has put before us to-day.

Mr. Silverman rose—

Sir S. Reed: I am not going to give way. Further, I would say definitely that if he had been at pains to understand even the elementary principles of the constitutional relations between the Government of India as by law established and this House, he would have realised how totally irrelevant are much of the argument and many of the statements he has made to-day. That does not alter the broad, essential fact of the situation mentioned by the hon. Member for North Camberwell (Mr. Ammon), that not one of us is happy and satisfied with the present situation in India. But that has nothing to do with this Bill. There is not one of us who would leave any stone unturned to produce happier relations and a more genuine constitutional form of government throughout the Provinces in India. When I say none of us, I include my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy as much as myself and the hon. Member for North Camberwell. We must all feel even more acute regret that owing to the further development of what I must call totalitarian ideas in the political life of India the prospect of a further development and association of Indian thought and feeling with public life and the Government machine is not moving so far and so actively as we had desired and hoped. But I put it to the House that that has nothing to do with the Bill before us. The Bill would be necessary in any circumstances whatsoever during the war, and

should be accepted as such, with the proviso that while we take that view, we shall still range ourselves wholeheartedly behind the Secretary of State and the Viceroy in using any power and influence we may possess to press forward the establishment of better relations in India and the more rapid movement of India towards that full self-government, that full Dominion status, which is our hope and our ambition.

Mr. Sorensen (Leyton, West): The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir S. Reed) said that this Bill has nothing to do with the situation in India and submitted that it was necessary under the circumstances, that is to say, that an election could not take place in India at this time. I feel bound to ask whether the same observation would apply, for example, to the Dominion of Australia. In Australia there has been in contemplation recently an election. If what has been said holds good regarding India, surely it must also hold good regarding Australia. It does not hold good about Australia, for the simple reason that we recognise that the Australians have a right to govern themselves as a Dominion and within the Statute of Westminster. The reason it does hold good in regard to India is that we do not yet recognise the right of Indians to govern themselves even on the same basis as the people of Australia. Therefore, I think the hon. Member's observations on that point were utterly irrelevant. I would put in this further plea, a plea eloquently expressed and elaborated by my hon. Friend the Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. Silverman), a plea for a recognition that this Bill will undoubtedly have an additional depressing effect on the people of India.

What have we to fear? If an election were to take place at the present time, the majority in India would either endorse the attitude of this Government or would repudiate it. If they endorsed the attitude of this Government, obviously we should rejoice, and I venture to submit that if we had anticipated that the overwhelming majority of the electors in India would endorse the policy of this Government in regard to India, it is quite likely that this Bill would not have seen the light of day. We should have gladly seized the opportunity to register to the whole world the fact that India entirely endorsed our own British-Indian policy.

It is because we feel, and with very sound reasons, that if an election were held now the majority of the people of India would vote against the policy of this Government, that this Bill has been hurried forward. It is lamentable that we have not taken the people of India into our confidence in this respect. In my estimation it would have done more for the prestige of this country, of democracy, and of the principles we hold dear, to hold an election even though it should go against the Government than to postpone it, and then to support that action with the sorry, the shallow and the untrue arguments which have been advanced to-day. I am certain that the reason why this Bill has been brought forward is not to be found in inter-communal differences. They existed in bygone days, and, unhappily, they are likely to exist in the days to come. We all desire most earnestly that in the course of time the gulf between the various communities shall be bridged, but this Bill will not help to bridge that gulf, in fact, will hinder the bridging of it. It will play into the hands of one group and will not in any sense of the word grapple with the real problem.

There is only one other thing I would add. It seems to me that there is evidence here of emphasis being given to the most unfortunate statement of the Prime Minister this week. The Prime Minister has made it clear that although the splendid principles embodied in the Eight-Point Charter signed by him and by President Roosevelt are for general application, they are not for specific application within the sphere where we are able to apply them. We are not going to apply them in a case where we could demonstrate to the world our consistency and sincerity. The Prime Minister has done a disservice to that Charter, which is excellent in many respects. I regret very much that there should be this additional emphasis of the Prime Minister's betrayal of his own principles. I believe that not only the few hon. Members who have spoken but others also in the House feel, not merely that it is unfortunate, to use a very mild word, that democratic elections should be suspended, but that for the sake of the great principles for which the whole world is in travail we should state boldly and courageously, "Let the elections be held." In that way we should show the

[Mr. Sorensen.] world that whether elections go for or against us we believe so much in the principles of democracy that we are prepared to take the consequences. Because the Government have not seen their way to do that, I believe they have done a great disservice, not only to the people of India, but to democracy throughout the world.

Mr. S. O. Davies (Merthyr): I rise to associate myself with what has been stated by my colleagues on these benches and to express my profound disappointment at this tinkering and most reactionary Bill. The statement made by the right hon. Gentleman can never convince anybody who has paid the least attention to Indian affairs that the reasons given by him are really justifiable. There is one thing which the right hon. Gentleman—and the Government for that matter—has overlooked. He seems to be completely unaware that in the last few years, and particularly during the last few months, a great deal of added interest in Indian affairs has been shown by the people of this country. That is not merely my own personal experience. When I and other hon. Members go on to public platforms to try and make the best contribution we can towards intensifying our war effort, the question of India, the rights of India, the claims of India and the injustices under which India suffers and has suffered for many years crop up far more frequently than in the past.

People are compelled to raise this question. They cannot help it. People who are intensely interested in the war effort and are extremely anxious to give of their best in the war effort are being forced to question—I say this most reluctantly—the protestations of some of the principal spokesmen of this Government with regard to the principles and ideals for which we are fighting because they are aware of the shocking conditions that exist among the many millions of people in India to-day. The right hon. Gentleman has overlooked that, and I do not think the Government have become aware of it. I must say, and I am quite certain I am correct, that he will not be able to avoid very serious consequences in this country in the form of questioning the sincerity of the Government if these shocking conditions are to be perpetuated until Heaven knows what date in the remote future.

To attempt to justify the postponement of the elections because there is alleged to be much communal feeling is really absurd. The right hon. Gentleman answered a question as to the number of political prisoners now in Indian prisons. Those political prisoners are the leaders of the Indian masses. The appalling figure given to us was over 12,000. Can it be said that imprisonment of these leading personalities among Indians has anything whatsoever to do with communal feeling? The right hon. Gentleman knows very well that the answer is "No." How can we reconcile a statement of that kind—without, by the way, any attempt to justify that mass imprisonment of Indian thinkers and Indian leaders and patriots as great as any of us—

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is really extending the Debate far beyond the scope of this Bill. The only thing the Bill deals with is the postponement of Provincial elections.

Mr. Davies: But surely any hon. Member is entitled to give reasons why he objects to the postponement of the elections. I am trying to give reasons.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is entitled to give reasons, but they must be relevant to the Bill.

Mr. Davies: I am trying to give reasons as to why the elections should not be postponed, and by implication I should like to make clear that if the elections were not postponed, the consequences would be of far-reaching effect to India and this country. It is not my desire to enlarge the scope of the Debate, but I think any hon. Member is entitled to draw the attention of the Government to the fact that we are engaged in a war to-day and that hon. Members here are alarmed at the fact that we are alienating the potential help of 400,000,000 people to-day. The noble Lord got up to correct my hon. Friend who opened the Debate from this side, protesting that recruiting in India had been a great success. If it were not tragic, it would be laughable that out of the millions of people in India the number recruited to the Armed Forces is simply absurd. I am against this Bill because I regard it as one of the most dangerous pieces of tinkering that the Government can indulge in to-day.

I am satisfied, and a number of my colleagues are satisfied, and an increasing

number of people in this country are satisfied, that the Indian people are ripe for self-government. I must add my protest to what has already been said against this Bill. Nothing that any Member of the Government can say will prevent our people trying to reconcile this Bill with what has already been referred to, the great Declaration made by our Prime Minister and President Roosevelt within the last few weeks. I do not know how that Declaration can be reconciled with the Bill. I do not think it can ever be done. The Government are inviting a situation that is alarming, because the question of the rights of India will very soon provide, I am afraid, the acid test of the sincerity of the Government and of the substance in the statement made by the Prime Minister and President Roosevelt.

Why cannot the right hon. Gentleman, in the great position that he occupies for good and for advancement to a position which can make a great contribution towards real civilisation, justify what we all profoundly hope we are fighting for? Instead of alienating this vast population and sentencing them again for an indefinite period to the terrible material conditions that obtain in India, why can he not get them on our side as Allies and friends? I am certain, and I think most hon. Members are certain, that the hatred of Fascism is as deeply rooted in India as it is in this country; why not harness that great force in the cause of freedom? I refuse to believe that that cannot be done. I believe that the ideals of our Indian friends are fundamentally identical with our own, but it is shocking that we should be alienating this great people in a crisis when we require their help and their physical, moral and spiritual assistance.

I object to the Bill because I regard the war as one of liberation. I am accepting every word of our Prime Minister and President Roosevelt, in their Declaration to the world the other day. Because of that Declaration we are under the most solemn obligation to apply the Charter to the Indian people. When I remember the great effort that our country is making to-day in this war of liberation, I believe that what the Prime Minister meant was liberation from exploitation, from economic insecurity and privation, from disease and hunger and from ignorance and superstition. We want to believe that we are fighting for that kind of

liberation. Why perpetuate the appalling conditions in India? I have with me statistics of the material conditions existing among the Indian people. I need not put them into words. The right hon. Gentleman knows very well what kind of language would give a correct description of them. The people of this country are against the Government in this matter. I am satisfied that the conditions of the Indian people are increasingly known to our own people. We are fighting to free the world from all kinds of Nazi, and pseudo-Nazi oppression, and the Government are under an obligation to make their contribution, where they can, towards India and thus give to the world abundant and unchallengeable evidence that they mean what they say.

Unless the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to give us something more constructive than has yet been adopted, he and the Government will hear a great deal more about the feelings of our country upon the treatment meted out to the Indian people. If the Government are prepared to risk a raising up of the appalling conditions that obtain there, I shall hold them responsible, and I shall say that they are guilty of the grossest criminal disservice to the people of this country in the cause in which we want to fight.

Mr. Edmund Harvey (Combined English Universities): I cannot but regret the words with which the hon. Member for Merthyr (Mr. S. O. Davies) has just finished his speech. I am convinced that the Government want to achieve the earliest realisation of the objective that they have proclaimed of full and equal partnership on the part of India in the Commonwealth of the Empire. I deeply regret also, as I think every hon. Member must regret, the situation which now exists and as a result of which, in part, the Bill is now before us. I wish it were possible even now to make another appeal to that good will that exists in India and to the earnest desire to make a great and united Indian contribution to human welfare which should bring together, even now, some of those Indian leaders, who, up to now, have been unable to co-operate.

There is no easy solution in front of us. Those who know anything of the details of the Indian situation must know that the Secretary of State is bearing an immense burden at this time. It is difficult

[Mr. Harvey.] for him to take the steps which will open the door he wants to see open, for the matter does not rest wholly with him; yet he has a unique measure of responsibility. Even now, if the doors of the prisons in India can be opened and an atmosphere of trust be created, it should be possible to get the leaders of all parties in India to come together for the service of India at this critical time. They might not be able to look far ahead. They know that now, when the whole civilisation of India and the future of India are imperilled, if they could come together to serve India and the welfare of humanity, working together, they would be able to prepare the way for a wider and fuller co-operation in the future and for the planning of the details of constitutional development that are yet so hard to foresee. There must be trust between Indians and Indians and between British statesmen and the Indian people.

On our side, we in the House of Commons can help a little at least to create that atmosphere. Unfortunately the Secretary of State has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. Only yesterday some of us may have seen a letter from an Indian left wing leader, Mr. Roy, addressed to the Viceroy, in which he, while urging his fellow countrymen to co-operate and to get above the differences which have separated them in order to work together for the service of India, spoke of the complacency of the Secretary of State. I am sure he could not have done that if he had met the Secretary of State, if he had heard him himself and, above all, if he had had an opportunity of intimate contact with him. How is it possible across an interval of thousands of miles—

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: I would remind the hon. Member that this is not an occasion on which we can debate the whole situation in India.

Mr. Harvey: I do not want to dispute your ruling, but I feel that this Bill would be unnecessary if the differences which exist at the present time in India could be solved. I will not attempt to pursue further the point to which I was referring, except to say that if this Bill is to go forward, it cannot achieve the success we want unless along with it a further effort is made by the Government—and I am sure it will be—to get over the difficulties that

we now deplore. The Secretary of State can show that he is not complacent. I am sure he will do it, and will in some way be able to make the great appeal that is needed to Indian patriots to co-operate together, and to co-operate and work in the fellowship of the Imperial Commonwealth, for the good of India and of the whole future of civilisation.

Mr. Cove (Aberavon): I do not rise at this moment to make any prolonged argument against this Bill. As a matter of fact there have been many important statements made by my hon. Friends who have preceded me, and I should imagine that the speech—the very able speech, although he did not claim to be an expert—of my hon. Friend the Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. Silverman) deserves an answer from the Government Front Bench. I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Nelson and Colne will forgive me if I correct his statement that he represents a minority view at least as far as his own party is concerned; I would like to emphasise that to-day the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne spoke for a growing group of Labour Members in this House who are giving intensive study and increasing attention to the condition of India and to the policies that are being pursued by the National Government in relation to India. As a matter of fact, had the time been more opportune, these benches would have been full of Members of the Labour party who are determined that the aims and objects for which we are fighting in this war shall be applied to India. I would like, in the few words I address to the House, to say that I was rather disappointed with my hon. Friend the Member for North Camberwell (Mr. Ammon), who spoke from the Front Bench to-day. I think he was disappointed with himself. So far as I have followed his speeches in the past, the hon. Gentleman has gone much further than he seemed to go to-day. He was soft-peddling to-day. I do not know what pressure may have been brought to bear upon him.

Mr. Ammon: No pressure has been brought to bear upon me, except that I think it is not necessary to repeat what I said some months ago, when I was the only Member in this House who criticised the setting-up of the particular Committee to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. I was concerned only with the narrow limits of the Bill.

Mr. Cove: I am very glad to have that assurance, because I was very much concerned, and a number of us were sympathising with him to-day. At any rate, let him resume on all occasions his active advocacy of Indian independence. He has behind him, I can assure him, an organised group of Members on his side of the House who are intensely and keenly interested in India, and who will support him on every occasion on which he puts forward the Labour party policy. Not only that, but I would remind him that he has behind him the annual Conference of the Labour party, so that he need have no fear at all in going forward with a thoroughly radical and progressive policy as far as India is concerned. I have always meant to say that, because I want to emphasise, and there is no make-belief about it at all, that there has come into being a new interest in India. It is a widespread interest. Friends tell me that all up and down the country there is this revived interest in the well-being and independence of India. The Government cannot shirk the issue by throwing all the responsibility upon any divisions that may exist in India. We govern and rule India, and it is the duty and responsibility of the Government to take the initiative as far as those things are concerned. It is a bankruptcy of statesmanship simply to say that these intense communal differences exist. We have been in India for 200 years or so, and if that is the result, if we cannot find a solution now along the lines and principles which we are advocating in this war, I say that it is a complete failure of British rule throughout the centuries in India.

It is perfectly true, as my right hon. Friend says, that the Bill seems to have narrow limits. That is one of the reasons why this discussion is not very much more widespread. There is a feeling that the Bill has narrow limits, but had it been appreciated that fundamental principles are involved in this Bill, I venture to assert that the Debate would have been much more intense than it has been. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nelson and Colne said, the policy represented by this Bill is a denial of democracy and democratic practice in India. I ask my right hon. Friend opposite, and I ask the National Government in which there are Labour representatives and in which our leaders take an active part and have their responsibilities, to reverse the engines

as far as India is concerned and to make a complete and radical change, to cease to pursue a policy of repression, and to follow the path of democracy—in brief, to apply the Atlantic Charter fully and freely to Indian conditions. It is surely hypocritical to say that we are fighting for the freedom of nations in Europe while denying that essential freedom in India. It gives the lie to the whole of our war effort, and is regarded as so doing. I hope that the Government will review the whole situation in the light of what we are fighting for. There is at this moment an increasing number of active people in this country, and an increasing number of Members of this House, who will insist that the principles and aims for which we are fighting shall be applied in the near future to conditions in India.

Question, "That the Bill be now read a Second time," put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the Whole House.—[Mr. A. Young.]

Resolved, "That this House will immediately resolve itself into the said Committee.—[Mr. A. Young.]

Bill accordingly considered in Committee.

[Colonel CLIFTON BROWN in the Chair.]

CLAUSE I.—(Postponement of certain general elections.)

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That the Clause stand part of the Bill."

Mr. Silverman: I am a little disappointed that the right hon. Gentleman, in view of the discussion which has taken place, in which he had only one supporter, and that one half-hearted, should not have felt it necessary to reply to the arguments put before him.

Mr. Amery: There is the Third Reading.

Mr. Silverman: I will withdraw my complaint and await the Third Reading. With regard to this Clause, what is the position with regard to by-elections that might be necessary from time to time? I understand that a great many members of these Legislative Assemblies are now, under Defence Regulations in India, sometimes under actual charges, in prison, and that when a member of these Legislative Assemblies is in prison in India under a Defence Regulation, or under

[Mr. Silverman.]

some political charge, the Government then proceed to do what the Government hesitate to do in the case of the hon. and gallant Member for Peebles and Southern (Captain Ramsay). They declare the seat vacant. How many people are now in that position in these Assemblies, and what is to be the position in regard to the vacancies? Are there to be by-elections, or has the Governor the right to allow a by-election in some cases and refuse it in others? In one case there was a place where Nehru was tried. After that trial there was a by-election in the constituency. There were three candidates. One was a Congress candidate, another was, I suppose, some kind of Government candidate—he was in opposition to Congress—and a third candidate got seven votes. We may disregard him. The Congress candidate got, I understand, 15 votes for every vote his opponent got. His opponent therefore lost his deposit, and the Congress man was elected. I do not know whether the Government in India have authorised any by-elections since then. I wonder what the position will be under this Clause about these by-elections. Is there to be any opportunity, such as we retain in this country, after the prolongation of our term, in by-elections from time to time to test public opinion?

Mr. Amery: The only effect of the present Bill is to postpone the date of the compulsory dissolution. It does not affect in any way the ordinary procedure in regard to by-elections, which remains in India as it is here.

Question, "That the Clause stand part of the Bill," put, and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without Amendment.

Mr. Amery: I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read the Third time."

I think it would be the wish of the House for me very briefly to turn to some of the arguments adduced on Second Reading. May I say, with all deference to Members opposite, that they seem to have entirely mistaken the reasons which I gave for this particular Measure? The main reason was the reason for which we have passed a similar Measure here, namely, that an election in the middle of

a struggle for life would involve interference with the war effort. That was the main reason I gave. It applies to India as it does here. I added that an additional reason in time of war for not holding these elections was the undoubted existence in many parts of India of very keen communal tension, which in recent months has led to a good deal of loss of life and property, and would undoubtedly be exacerbated by the holding of an election. I gave a third reason peculiar to the Indian situation. In certain Provinces Ministries have refused to serve, and presumably would continue to refuse to serve if an election were held, so that an election would, under those conditions, until this situation changes and until that policy is modified, be a purely futile procedure. What some hon. Members have ignored is that there are four great Provinces in India, with a population of something like 100,000,000 persons, in which normal democratic government is in effect to-day, with regard to which the position, so far as postponement of elections is concerned, is similar to that in this House. There is no reason to believe that if elections were held there, there would be returned anyone not fully supporting the war effort. I think that is all I need say on the immediate and narrow purposes of this Bill.

It would not be in Order for me on Third Reading to go into wider issues beyond just saying this in answer to the hon. Member for Aberavon (Mr. Cove). It is not in one party only in this House of Commons but in the whole of this House and the country that there is a genuine desire to see India find her position as soon as possible as a free and equal partner in the British Commonwealth. That is a matter of principle in which we have taken the lead before the Atlantic Charter, which introduces no new principle, was ever promulgated. It is also a matter which has to be carried out in practice, and I, in my position, would be very grateful if Members who are so eager for immediate action would help me by giving me their precise scheme under which control of Indian affairs could be given to an Indian Government able to continue by agreement among Indians themselves.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without Amendment.