



DEBATES

SESSION OF 1942.

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STATE COUNCIL OF CEYLON.

Wednesday, August 12, 1942.

The Council met at 10 a.m., MR. SPEAKER [THE HON. SIR WAITIALINGAM DURAISWAMY] in the Chair.

CREATION OF A MINISTRY OF FOOD.

The debate on the following motion of Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam was continued:

"That this Council is of opinion that the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food with a new orientation of policy in the matter of purchase, control, pricing and distribution is a paramount and overriding necessity for the safety, preservation and defence of this country."

The Hon. Mr. D. S. Senanayake (Minister of Agriculture & Lands): On the last occasion, I was trying to point out that the support that this motion received from different quarters, judging from the speeches that were made, was not because of the meaning or the wording of it but for quite different reasons—reasons which are quite different from the meaning that could be attached to the motion itself. I pointed out that, according to the wording of the motion, it was definitely a vote of censure on the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce, because the motion speaks of "a new orientation of policy" and so on. It is not a vote of censure on the Minister but on the Ministry itself. But the reasons given were that the motion was not meant to be a vote of censure on either the Ministry or the Minister, but that it was meant to bring about a new policy for the better working of the Constitution.

With regard to this motion, there were three suggestions made by the mover. There were two other suggestions made, not while the mover was speaking, but when he was interrupting other speakers. Whatever it is, there were five suggestions made.

I believe one suggestion deals with the redistribution of subjects. That, in

[Note.—An asterisk (*) against the name of a Member indicates that his remarks have not been revised by him.]

itself, is not in accordance with motion, because the motion it contemplates, as I pointed out, the creation of an additional Ministry. If it was a question of redistribution, and in the redistribution the matter was to be left to the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce, there was no objection as long as it was to be the only subject which the Ministry was to administer.

***Mr. B. H. Aluwahare (Matale):** That was one of the proposals.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: When I hear various statements made, I wish to ask my hon. Friends to look again at the resolution and not think of what was in the minds of other people when they were speaking in support of the resolution.

The resolution itself does not show that it is a question of a redistribution of functions; it deals with the creation of a new Ministry and that is indicated in the resolution. I believe it is expressed in the resolution. That is why I would rather that Members, when they come to vote on the motion, would bear in mind what they want and try to see whether they can support the motion under such circumstances. When the motion states that a new Ministry should be created, it implies that what is wanted is not a redistribution of subjects.

***Mr. G. G. Ponnambalam (Point Pedro):** Why not?

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: My hon. Friend asks, "Why not?" I would ask him, I would beg of him, to read this resolution over again. The resolution says:

"That this Council is of opinion that the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food with a new orientation of policy in the matter of purchase, control

That is what the hon. Member suggests—"the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food". If the hon. Member's intention was that there should be a redistribution of subjects, I believe it could be achieved by a resolution of this House, and it would have been quite easy for my hon. Friend to move that the other subjects might be distributed among the other Ministers and the question of food only left to the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce. The Constitution provides for such a thing. The hon. Member could have done it himself. But that was not done.

[The Hon. Mr. Senanayake.]

The hon. Member definitely states that there should be a new Ministry created. Although the hon. Member now says that it was intended to be so, in one of the reasons he gave he said that there could be a Minister appointed either with a Committee or without a Committee—an additional Ministry. That was one of his reasons. So that you will find that a redistribution of subjects was not one of the things that the hon. Member had contemplated, although he now considers it as a possibility.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** I said so in my speech.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: If he had said so in his speech, I certainly think it would have been very much better. The hon. Member, in the course of his speech, said that this motion was not a vote of censure but was meant to bring about the creation of a Food Ministry and a new orientation of policy. That this is not a vote of censure, or that it is possible to have a redistribution of subjects, to my mind, is not implied in the resolution.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Do you accept an amendment for that purpose—for a redistribution?

***The Hon. Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike (Minister of Local Administration):** Yes.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: As far as we are concerned, if the House wants certain things done, we endeavour to give effect to the wishes of the House. But the point is what the House wants done.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** That is all.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: If the House thinks that a redistribution of subjects is the remedy, then we will certainly adhere to that and work the scheme. But I would like to point out that, as far as we are concerned, we would like to consider that suggestion. My definite opinion is that redistribution itself will not solve the problem. Perhaps it might be a little better than changing the pillow to cure a headache; it may be a little better than that. But certainly it will—

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** It would be better than the present arrangement.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: It may be better than the present arrangement.

There is not the slightest doubt that the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce has been saddled with many subjects and that he is the most hard-worked Minister to-day, and that if he is relieved of some of his duties and those duties entrusted to others who have leisure, it may perhaps be an improvement on the present position. It may be possible that that suggestion may be acceptable to the hon. Minister and the other Ministers as well. But before that suggestion is accepted, we would like the House to consider what all that means.

With regard to the question of food, I feel certain that this system of Government is wholly unsuitable at the present time.

Mr. R. Sri Pathmanathan (Mannar-Mullaitivu): At any time.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: At any time. But it is more unsuitable at this time.

Take the question of food. We have to make too many purchases from abroad. The Committee has to make too many decisions on this question; it has to make decisions on the method of control. Now if any decision is reached, and the matter becomes known to the people in the trade concerned you must realize that various steps will be taken by the industry. We have had many instances. We have heard it stated that all the sugar stocks in the Island went underground when those in the industry heard that the Committee had considered the question of increasing the price on the future imports of sugar. Is that not so?

Mr. H. E. Newnham (Nominated Member): I think the statement was made in this House first, not in the Committee.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: I believe the question of the price of sugar was considered in the Committee.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Did Budget secrets leak out from an Executive Committee?

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: My hon. Friend is under the impression that I am blaming the Executive Committee. I am doing nothing of the sort. But the point I am making is this, that where decisions have to be made—whether it is the Ministers collectively or the Committees or the Heads of Departments—when there are so many people discussing a question, the facts are bound to leak out, with the result that advantage would be taken by those who are engaged in the industry concerned.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Give us some instances.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: I am trying to give you instances.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: What about the Board of Ministers?

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: My hon. Friend was on the Board of Ministers. He must know how facts leak out. I am not trying to draw a distinction between the Members of the Board of Ministers and the Executive Committees. You can have my assurance on that point. I do not for a moment say that the Ministers are superior even to the Committee Members; I do not say that.

The only point I am making is this: when important subjects are discussed among a large number of people, the information is bound to leak out, and you will find people interested benefitting by such information leaking out. At a time like the present, whether you have to control commodities or fix prices, you have to be very careful to ensure that information is confined if possible to one man.

I certainly think that if a Minister is in charge of a subject, it would be very much better if he decided on a matter before anything was done. Supposing we had a Cabinet, then the Cabinet may alter that decision after due consideration. But the considering of matters for a long time and then coming to decisions will only lead to trouble and will not make it possible for any Ministry to function effectively.

The hon. Member for Matale (Mr. Aluwihare) wants instances. I gave as an instance the question of sugar. There was also the question of cloth, for instance. There were many other questions

like that, as you know. Even with regard to rationing, things of that sort have happened. I am only telling you that even with a redistribution of subjects, all these defects will remain, the disadvantage will be there and the same discontent will prevail in the country. You will not solve the problem. Of course, to this extent I am agreeable to this proposal, that it will give relief to a Minister who deserves a little relief. He is overburdened with work, and if he can be given some relief, to that extent I certainly think the proposed arrangement would be better than the present state of affairs. But the disease will not be cured.

The next suggestion was with regard to a Minister without a portfolio, or rather without a Committee.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** A Minister without a portfolio would be a contradiction in terms!

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: In fact, the hon. Member's speech was a contradiction in terms; so I do not know what he meant.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** Not such a contradiction as "Minister without a portfolio". It is meaningless.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: Whatever it is, it was to be a Minister with or without a Committee.

Now, if it is a question of having one Minister without a Committee, I do not think it will be satisfactory. When hon. Members speak it seems that they are under the impression that there is collective responsibility on the part of the Ministers in the case of all subjects. It is not so. There is no collective responsibility, and if you have no Committee and only a Minister it will mean that there will be a Minister by himself without even a Committee to back him up, or it may even be that he may be acting contrary to the wishes of the other Ministers. There will be no way of seeing that things are done according to a plan approved by anyone.

Another point is that I do not think that there is any reason why some Ministers should have Committees attached to them and others have no Committees attached. Well, if it is argued that a Committee is not necessary, then I contend that in all cases Committees are not

[The Hon. Mr. Senanayake.] necessary. There are advantages in having Committees, but at the same time if you want to have central responsibility you cannot have a Committee System. I am in favour of Committees being abolished, but if it is a question of Ministers, I certainly think that they must all be of the same status, either all should have Committees attached to them or all should function without Committees. If it is a question of Ministers with Committees, I wonder how the eighth Ministry is going to be formed and how that Committee is to be selected.

Therefore, taking all these points into consideration, I think the Ministers are of opinion that although redistribution is possible it will not be effective enough. We shall be certainly willing to adopt that system if you want it, but we say that it will lead to disappointment. The only thing is we feel, as we have always felt, that if you want a change, and a change is necessary now, the only change that is possible is a change into the Cabinet System of Government. The Ministers have always wanted a Cabinet System of Government so that they can fix responsibility, and I can assure this House that all the Ministers are prepared—[A MEMBER: All?]—to resign now if the House wants it and the Governor can elect a Leader.

*Mr. Ponnambalam: Who will elect a Leader?

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: The Governor.

*The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva (Minister of Health): The House will elect him.

*Mr. Aluwihare: We will elect him.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: I said "the Governor" because that was the resolution of this House, and it is the Constitutional practice everywhere.

*Mr. Aluwihare: No.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: This House itself said so, and that was the principle accepted by this House—the Governor, was to send for the Leader and ask him to form a Cabinet. That is the practice everywhere. When the Leader chooses the Cabinet, it will be composed of the best persons he can get together

to run the Government. I definitely say, Sir, that as far as we are concerned we have always wanted it, and if there is anyone who prevented this happening I think it is the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam); he has been responsible for it.

*Mr. Ponnambalam: Why only 1? The House turned down your suggestion of a Cabinet.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: Who told you that?

*Mr. Ponnambalam: That was the decision.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: No, not at all. Perhaps my hon. Friend thinks he is the House, because even on the last occasion—I was not here then—I think six voted against it. The House has accepted it. My hon. Friend wanted to introduce into this Cabinet System some communal elements and all sorts of things, without trying to get the best persons together irrespective of the communities to which they belonged. That was the trouble that arose and it prevented the Cabinet System being accepted. We are always in favour of the Cabinet System, and I have not the slightest doubt that the Leader would elect a Cabinet representative of the best brains available from among those who are in this Council and those who are most capable of doing the work, irrespective of any other considerations. If that is acceptable, it will undoubtedly be the best solution.

With regard to the Cabinet System I must say one thing. I feel certain that just at this time more than seven Ministers are necessary.

*Mr. Aluwihare: We will all find seats in the Cabinet!

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: I do not say that all should find seats in the Cabinet, but you will realize that more than seven are necessary at this time.

*Mr. Ponnambalam: How many?

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: Fifteen!

*The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva: Make

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: As far as the number is concerned, it is for the Leader who will be elected to know what team he will require. I am not going to suggest the number. I am only indicating the lines on which we should work. But at the same time I might say that it was considered by this House some time ago that nine were necessary.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** What are we discussing?

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: The hon. Member wants to know what we are discussing. We are discussing the motion before the House.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Are we discussing a new Ministry or something else?

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: If the hon. Member is rising to a point of order, I would like to know what he has to say. [Pause.] Well, the Leader can decide what number he wants. Perhaps nine may be necessary.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Twelve.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: I am not going to commit myself to any number, but if you want to have an unwieldy Cabinet for the purpose of giving everyone an opportunity of getting into it, we may have this Council as the Cabinet. But it has to be of a reasonable size. So everyone will not have an opportunity of getting into it.

That is what I have to say with regard to that aspect of the matter. But there are one or two other things that I should like to say before I sit down, with regard to the dissatisfaction that exists in the country in connexion with food purchase.

Hon. Members perhaps are not aware of all the circumstances of the case when they sometimes harshly or unreasonably criticize the people responsible for the matter. I do not say that everything has gone on well, or that everything has gone on as it should have. I have my own views with regard to this matter. But at the same time I think it is just as well for us to bear in mind the circumstances under which we had to make these purchases. It is only after knowing the full facts of the case that one can judge for oneself whether blame or praise should be attributed to any one individual.

Hon. Members might remember the time when the Indian Government agreed to allot to us 38,000 tons of rice per month. At that time we were aware that we would receive a certain quantity of rice from Madras. Before that agreement was reached hon. Members must realize that we were receiving only 140,000 tons of rice a year from India. Well, when the quantity of rice came to over 400,000 tons of rice a year as against 140,000 tons, and that also from one Province, one has to realize that for that purpose a proper organization had to be set up, and that it would take some time to do so.

At the time that this agreement was reached, the harvest was just coming in, and if any purchases were to be made they should have been made at that time, because it is the usual practice in India as in every other country for a large number of mill owners to enter into forward contracts before they purchase the paddy for milling. At that time all that we were told was that we would receive a certain quota from Madras. In the case of the other places, we have not been given the quota yet. So it was only in the case of Madras that there was the possibility of entering into an immediate contract, and these contracts cannot be entered into with anyone and everyone. According to our agreement, the usual trade channels had to be utilized for the purchase of rice.

At the time the biggest traders in Ceylon happened to be Indians and some of them went away. It was with those who had remained in Ceylon and others in India that negotiations had to be started. But unfortunately, just when the negotiations were to be started there came the raid, which resulted in the rest of the people also leaving the country and making shipping difficult. So if all the rice that was promised by India was not obtained at the very beginning itself, it was because there were certain circumstances which made it difficult for us to do so.

By that time there were two or three Provinces from which we were to have obtained our paddy. I think, they were—my Hon. Friend the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, will correct me if I am wrong—Madras, Karachi and Bengal. There was a

[The Hon. Mr. Senanayake.]
 certain quantity of rice available in those Provinces, but unfortunately, owing to the raid and the resultant difficulties, we were not able to secure that rice. There were those difficulties and they have to be borne in mind when we criticize the Ministry.

There is one thing that I might say. Although there was a certain delay, whether it was justifiable delay or not, in purchasing rice, it must be said to the credit of that Ministry that it was due to the foresight of that Ministry that we were able to have a stock of two months' supply in hand. This was possible because of the action taken by that Ministry. If that stock had not been available, I believe, we would have been in a very difficult position. I am sure no Minister would ever object to criticism, but at the same time hon. Members themselves should realize that they would be better fitted to make that criticism only when in possession of all the facts.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Give us the facts.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: These are the facts. Unfortunately there is a belief, when facts are stated, that there are other facts which are not disclosed. But how can we state facts that do not exist? These are the facts.

The facts are that when restriction was started, there was in this country, in the granaries, two months' stock in addition to a similar supply in the hands of private individuals—on estates and in the hands of others. We then tried to obtain some rice from Burma, but we could not get it. We then tried to obtain some rice from India, and although there was a promise to supply us with rice we were not able to obtain all the rice that was promised; we were able to obtain only a certain quantity of it.

What happened after these merchants left? Some of the Indian merchants and others who had licences—I do not mean the people who were operating here—some of them who were here and had licences kept those licences to themselves and started to dictate prices. It was quite easy for them to do so because the quantity that was allowed to be exported to Ceylon was 38,000 tons. After the licences for that quantity were issued, we could not go to any other merchant

except to those who had a licence and those people had the right to say, "If you do not pay my price, then you forfeit your opportunity of getting rice from here". There were, therefore, those difficulties, and I would ask hon. Members to bear those difficulties in mind.

With regard to the motion itself—I do not want to delay the House any longer—the mover himself does not state in the motion—

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** I cannot give it to you.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: What he has he cannot give me; I am certain of that. He need not tell me that.

But at the same time, whether there was understanding or no understanding, I would expect this much of the hon. Member, that if the motion indicates one thing and he does not mean that thing, then, I think, he is in honour bound to withdraw the motion and not try to secure something which he does not mean. That is all I have to say.

Mr. S. Natesan (Kankesanturai): Listening to the speech of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, one would have thought that one was in for an aftermath of the Reforms debate. Taking the motion as it is my first impression was that it did not call for an amendment of the Constitution. The wording, apart from the speech of the mover of the resolution, indicates just this, that in the present circumstances the country demands an independent Ministry of Food. I think the mover himself indicated, in the course of his speech, that that was his primary intention. He said that it was imperative that there should be a Ministry giving its undivided attention to this problem of food.

But of course in the course of his remarks he developed his thesis further and went, I should say, beyond the ambit of this resolution. He suggested that in order to implement this resolution it might be necessary to make a slight amendment of the Constitution. That was what he said. Of course, he did not clearly realize what those amendments were precisely to be. But he seemed to be most anxious that something should be done at the present moment to allay public apprehension

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with regard to the handling of the food problem. I think there can be no gainsaying the fact that there is such a demand in this country that we should give our immediate attention to a satisfactory solution of this problem.

My own personal view is this; and I thought for a moment that I would be in the happy company of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands, with regard to this view, because at one stage of his speech he seemed to indicate that all that the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) wanted to effect by means of this resolution could easily be effected by a different allocation of subjects. I am sorry that he developed that line of argument for a while and then dropped it and went on to his favourite subject of Cabinet Government.

I think the object which the mover has in view and which most of us would like to support could be achieved if a certain amendment of this resolution which I propose to move is accepted. According to my amendment, the motion will read :

“ . . . that an independent Ministry of Food should be created within the ambit of the present Constitution ”.

I think that could be easily done. My own personal view is that either the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce should concern himself solely with this question of food and give it his undivided attention, or, if that is not possible, we should assign this function, preferably, to the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands. Of course out of his modesty he cannot make that suggestion himself, but I think his shoulders are broad enough to bear this burden, and I go further and say that in the circumstances of the case it is only the Minister of Agriculture and Lands who can tackle this question properly, not on account of his personal abilities which are certainly well known, but on the ground that the Minister of Agriculture and Lands is the Minister who ought to be primarily in charge of food, because he is in charge of food production.

A number of difficulties have arisen in the course of the past few months owing to the Minister of Labour, Industry and

Commerce holding this portfolio, and the hon. Member for Matale (Mr. Aluwihare) and myself have pointed out on more than one occasion that there has not been the necessary co-ordination between food production and food control. I think if this problem is to be satisfactorily tackled at all there should be that co-ordination.

The fact that the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce was called upon to administer this problem of food control is a mere accident which could not have been envisaged in all its implications by the framers of this Constitution. Sir, here is a crisis and, I think, as the crisis develops we shall have to depend more and more upon our local production of food. There might soon come a time when we shall not be able to get from abroad what we used to obtain. It would resolve itself primarily into a question coming within the sole province of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands, and he cannot shirk this burden by getting away from the Chamber when I am discussing it. I think it will soon come within his province to see that food production is properly co-ordinated with food control.

We know that in this country at the present moment there is a stock of food supplies in the different Provinces which has not been properly utilized. There has been no co-ordination; there has been no exact planning. We do not know how much we produce in this country, and how much can be made available from one part of the country to other parts of the Island. All that is the function of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands. Though on this occasion it might seem a sort of digression to develop this point, I think it is necessary to make it clear that not only could we have this proposal effected within the ambit of the present Constitution, but it becomes imperative in the present circumstances that the Minister of Agriculture and Lands should be called upon to tackle this problem, co-ordinating both food production and food control. I trust that this amendment will have the acceptance and backing of a large majority of Members of this House.

I do not want to go further than that. Of course, the Minister of Agriculture

[Mr. Natesan.]

and Lands began to analyse the ideas that motivated—if I may use a favourite expression of the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam)—the moving of this resolution. But I think it is unnecessary to deal with that aspect of the matter. If the House feels that something should be done in response to the wishes of the electors whom we represent, I think this is the only solution. So I commend this amendment to the House. The amendment is to insert the words “within the ambit of the present Constitution” between the words “distribution” and “is” in line 3 of the resolution.

Mr. S. Vytilingam (Talawakele) seconded.

Mr. Speaker: The amendment is to insert the words “within the ambit of the present Constitution” immediately after the word “distribution”. The motion and the amendment are before the House.

***The Hon. Mr. Bandaranaike:** I do not wish to allow a motion like the present one to go to the vote without as full an expression of the views of Members of this House as well as of the Members of the Board of Ministers being placed before hon. Members—before they finally come to a decision upon the motion, what finally the House imagines or wants this motion to be, and any decision it may arrive at upon one or more of the amendments which will no doubt be placed before the House. One has already been placed before the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan).

It cannot be denied that this motion is an important motion not only in itself, that is, in the particular change which it proposes to bring about, but also in certain implications that can very easily be read into it. I must say at the outset that although the motion has been explained by the mover himself, as well as by other hon. Members, the actual wording of the motion is perhaps not altogether clear or fortunate. The motions reads:

“That this Council is of opinion that the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food with an Executive Committee created by the word “creation”. In

new orientation of policy in the matter of purchase, control, pricing and distribution is a paramount and overriding necessity for the safety, preservation and defence of this country.”

In the first place, there were, in the light of explanations given, of the motion, certain difficulties created in the word “creation”. Of course, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands, straightforward man that he is, can only contemplate one particular form of creation. The word “creation” has to him the connotation of something new being brought about. But the more subtle mind of the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) can conceive of various different types of creation of not merely something entirely new being created, but something existing being remoulded to furnish a new creation.

Well, that in itself is certainly a creation. We have had literary creations in that way, where something old is remoulded to have the meaning of perhaps an entirely new creation. The mover's explanation therefore is that it is not something entirely new alone that he contemplates as a possible alternative in the sense of an entirely new Ministry, an eighth Ministry with an eighth Executive Committee attached or another Minister without an Executive Committee, but he does contemplate the possibility of the present Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce who functions partly as the Minister of Food being converted with his Executive Committee into a Ministry of Food by the simple expedient of having certain parts of his anatomy, his ministerial anatomy, amputated painlessly, or otherwise leaving him only with the one proboscis of Food. Well, that is a certain possibility which he contemplates; or, according to the amendment that has been moved by the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan), about which I will have to say something later, he wants this done within this Constitution.

That is one alternative. There are other alternatives like the Minister of Food with this Executive Committee or Minister without an Executive Committee. I will explain those alternatives shortly.

Let us therefore eliminate perhaps the unfortunate difficulty which might be

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the light of the explanations given to this House, we can interpret it to mean almost anything.

Then there is this further difficulty which I think the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) will admit, that is, the difficulty in the words "with a new orientation of policy in the matter of purchase", and so on. In view of the fact that I contemplate the possibility, which is quite reasonable, of the Minister of Labour himself continuing to function as Minister of Food, apparently there is a certain contradiction involved in the expression "a new orientation of policy".

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** Not necessarily.

***The Hon. Mr. Bandaranaike:** Not necessarily, it is true. Not only does he want to recreate the physical aspects of my Hon. Friend the Minister of Labour, remoulding him into Minister of Food, but he also wants to recreate his mind, to infuse into his mind a new policy altogether in dealing with these subjects. The Hon. Minister of Labour will say that whatever dissatisfaction there may be, legitimate dissatisfaction perhaps in certain instances, which have to be corrected, it is not due to any wrong policy which he has followed.

Therefore the words "new orientation of policy" in the motion do create certain difficulties unless it is explained clearly what the matters of policy are that have been wrong hitherto and which require to be reorientated. Of course, I do not suppose the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam), precise as he usually is in the language he uses, as a lawyer should be, would again say that he does not attach too much weight to these particular words in the sense of influencing the particular method of change that is to be adopted. In other words, one might normally have interpreted the hon. Member introducing those words as precluding the possibility of the present Minister of Labour continuing to be in charge of this subject. It might quite legitimately be interpreted to imply that, but of course the hon. Member says "No". That is definitely not his view.

I have pointed out so far two expressions in this motion—one, the word "creation" and this other phrase—which create difficulties on which I think

we quite legitimately need not lay too much stress in view of the explanations given. Nor do I propose to lay too much stress upon those words in dealing with the motion.

This motion follows a motion moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Udugama (Mr. Abeywickrama) which amounted to a vote of censure upon the Minister of Labour. That motion was a very limited motion, restricting itself only to two items of the largely ramified subject which is again handled by the Ministry of Labour, and he proposed to censure the Minister on two specified points. The Hon. Minister gave certain explanations which the House felt were fairly reasonable at least, and that motion was defeated.

The position amongst many Members of the House, as far as I understood it, about the motion of the hon. Member for Udugama was this: there was dissatisfaction regarding the handling of this all-important subject of food, and although it was not proper to vote for the motion which was a direct vote of censure on the Hon. Minister, particularly a vote of censure restricted in its scope, very greatly restricted in its scope, they still felt, without laying any personal blame upon the Minister or any other person, that it was desirable to effect certain changes in order that this important subject could be dealt with adequately and effectively.

I cannot consider such an attitude as being unreasonable. That is, if the House does feel, and in so feeling reflects the general attitude taken up or opinion held by the public, that this is a subject of great importance and that every possible step available should be taken to ensure that it is handled adequately and effectively, I do not think for one moment hon. Members are doing anything wrong in bringing forward any motion in this House to give effect to that opinion. Therefore I do not in any way blame my hon. Friend the Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) in following up that rather abortive motion of censure against the Hon. Minister of Labour with this specific resolution.

Sir, what does this motion amount to? If we are to take at their face value the speeches made by hon. Members—I see no reason personally why they should not

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be taken at their face value; I am unaware personally of any reason why we should read into the speeches made by hon. Members something more than what they themselves have said—they say that the Hon. Minister of Labour is at present overburdened with work. Now that is a simple matter of fact. Is it so or not? I think the various subjects, important subjects, with which the Hon. Minister of Labour has to deal, the all-important subject of labour—labour on estates, labour in the Harbour; labour in all kinds of work that in these times have become essential and are included in the category of essential works—to deal with the important subject of all industries and the development of industries; to deal with the very difficult subject of Governmental purchase of certain products such as plumbago and coconuts, and so on, in addition to the various subjects connected with food—to use the one word “food”—we might very reasonably come to the conclusion that it does constitute a volume of work that it is not easy for an individual to handle. Certainly, it is a volume of work which no one individual handles, as far as I am aware, in any other country; certainly not in England where there are a large number of Ministers dealing with certain aspects of the food problem which is all concentrated in the hands of one Minister here.

Hon. Members therefore say—those of them who have expressed their opinions—“You have done well so far, in the sense that the co-ordination, administratively, of the more important Departments that handle subjects connected with food has been placed in the hands of an Officer who has proved himself to be a very capable administrator and organizer, in whom the country as well as Members of this House have every reason to repose confidence. That is a step forward, but we are not satisfied with that alone”. Hon. Members say that from the parliamentary point of view, apart from the administrative, they would like to see a certain change in the sense of a Minister, or a Minister and an Executive Committee, handling the subject to be reasonably free from other important duties, so that the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce can in future not only eat food, but think food and dream food and devote his whole

time to this question, who can think of it when he is travelling in his car, think of it in his bath—where some brilliant new idea may occur to him in grappling with some knotty point.

That is a point of view with which we cannot but sympathize. I cannot say that I am prepared to oppose it. I cannot say that I am prepared to state that the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce is sufficiently free now to devote as much time to this subject as he might wish to do, though no doubt he devotes a great deal of his time to it.

Now the question arises, how can this generally desirable object be given effect to—that the Minister, who handles this important subject of food should be reasonably free to devote as much time to the subject as it requires. That is really the crux of the matter. How is it to be given effect to?

Various alternatives have been mentioned in this House. I will take the first, which has been referred to by the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, that is the introduction of a Cabinet System. In discussing the Governor's proposals on Reforms, the question of a change-over from the Executive Committee System of Government to a Cabinet form of Government, come up in this House and a majority of this House accepted the position that we should have a Cabinet System but the Cabinet System as is ordinarily understood in any country where Parliamentary Government and a Cabinet System exists, namely, that the Head of the Administration, the Governor, should call upon some individual who he thought would command the support of the majority of the House, or the leader of the largest party in the House, to form a Cabinet, the names of the members of the proposed Cabinet being submitted to him for approval.

To be quite fair in dealing with this question of the Cabinet System of Government—I am not against it; I acquiesced in it though the House knows that I have certain ideas with regard to the Executive Committee system—I acquiesced in the Cabinet System—one way of dealing with the problem at this juncture may be to abolish the Executive Committee System and have a Cabinet System, to give elasticity in the sense

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that the Prime Minister would be able to have any number of members in the Cabinet. He is not restricted to any particular number; he can allocate the subjects among them as he wishes, and in that way the object which the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) has in mind can be achieved.

That is one way. But there are certain further implications in the Cabinet System. There is not the least doubt that the Members of this House who belong to minority communities oppose the Cabinet System on the ground that with representation in the House as it exists at present, a Cabinet System would deprive them of even some of the safeguards which they believe they now possess under the Executive Committee System of Government. I do not think I misrepresent their point of view when I say that that was their point of view, rightly or wrongly, and a change-over now to a Cabinet System which would receive anything like the support of the Members of the minority communities must obviously be combined, if I mistake not, with the demand that it be not only a Cabinet System of Government but also a National Government, the word "National" being used definitely in the sense of representation in the Cabinet of minority groups in this House.

Let us be very clear in discussing these matters as to what Members want or do not want. Whether we agree with a point of view or not, let us at least be clear in our own minds as to what that point of view is, discussing an important subject such as this.

I would like to have a definite assurance on that point. I am in favour of a Cabinet System of Government; I am not against it. But will my hon. Friends the Members representing minorities in this House accept as a solution to the difficulties envisaged in this motion a Cabinet System without the further implication, namely a Cabinet System as a National Government, giving definite representation to minority groups in this House? I would like to have an answer to that question from any Member representing minorities who may speak after me, particularly from the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) in his reply.

If they say that they envisage a National Government, then it becomes a

very serious problem. The minorities' Members are certainly entitled to hold that view, but if they do, then the change envisaged is not merely a Cabinet System but a Cabinet System with the further definite implication I have referred to.

So that, before I am prepared to accept the proposal for a Cabinet System of Government, I would like to know what form of Cabinet System Members of this House are asked to agree to.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** That is not part of this motion.

***The Hon. Mr. Bandaranaike:** But it happens to be one of the ways of solving the difficulties envisaged. As it happens to be mentioned in this House, it is my duty to clear that issue, to understand clearly in my own mind what precisely it does mean.

That was one solution. I am not against a Cabinet System, but if it contains that implication—as expected by minorities' Members—the question becomes important. I do not think—and I am now expressing the views of the Board of Ministers—that the Board of Ministers contemplate a National Government in that sense at all. So that hon. Members must also have in mind what the term "Cabinet System" that has been put forward in this House means. As I said before, that is not the view of the Board of Ministers.

Then the other alternatives are these; these alternatives arise out of the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan). He wants the change given effect to "within the ambit of the present Constitution".

What are the alternatives? As far as I can see there are three alternatives. One is to form an entirely new Ministry. We have seven now under the Constitution. By an amendment of the Order in Council, an eighth Ministry is to be formed—call it the Ministry of Food—with an Executive Committee and a Ministry to deal with this extra subject, or have a Minister without an Executive Committee. The third alternative would be the re-distribution of subjects among the existing Ministers in such a way that you have this one Minister to deal with the important subject of food. He would

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be relieved of various other important subjects and be in a position to devote his whole time to it. Those are the three alternatives "within the ambit of the present Constitution". Let us examine them.

With regard to a new Ministry being created—a new Minister with an Executive Committee—the proposal has certain difficulties. You will have to have more or less a complete regrouping of all these Executive Committees. The Executive Committees have a certain number of Members now, and if you are going to have eight Executive Committees it would involve an entire regrouping of the Executive Committees, and when you have this eighth Executive Committee you may well get a Minister of Food—that is a possibility to be considered—who has had no experience of dealing with the subject at all. So that, intrinsically, you may fundamentally defeat the object that the House has in view by having Members on that Executive Committee as well as a Minister, none of whom has hitherto been familiar with these Departmental subjects that are at the present moment grouped under the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce.

The second alternative must be a Minister without an Executive Committee, and if that is to be within the framework of the present system, it is a still more undesirable move, because you are going to have a special kind of Minister on the Board, who will not be a Member elected by any Executive Committee; you will have a Minister elected by the whole House. I do not know how that Minister is going to be elected. He will be responsible to the whole House; he will be in a peculiar position of his own.

*The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva: He might be nominated!

*The Hon. Mr. Bandaranaike: He will be in a peculiar position within the present Board of Ministers. That is bound to give rise to various difficulties.

Then there is the third alternative—of the redistribution of subjects. There might be difficulties—there no doubt are—but this is the alternative which in my opinion deserves the closest and most sympathetic consideration. If I were personally to express any opinion—apart, of course, from the idea of having a Cabi-

net System, of which I am in favour, without the further implications to which I referred—in my personal opinion, the most satisfactory solution of the problem to give effect to the wishes of hon. Members without unduly disturbing the present Constitution is to adopt the third alternative of redistributing the subjects. There is no question whatever about that. Though it has difficulties—none of these alternatives is free of difficulties—it does seem to be the one satisfactory method of dealing with the matter.

Unfortunately, one does not know how far, if at all, these various alternatives are involved in this motion, and to find out which particular alternative this House favours is a difficult problem. Certainly the terms of the motion have been narrowed down by the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan) by reducing the possible alternatives to those within the ambit of the present Constitution, leaving it, I presume, to the Board of Ministers to decide which particular alternative we can adopt.

*Mr. Ponnambalam: The only possible alternative under the present Constitution is the redistribution of functions.

*The Hon. Mr. Bandaranaike: I do not know whether the hon. Member interprets the term "within the ambit of the present Constitution" in that narrow sense, not in the broader sense, of excluding—

Mr. Natesan: That is exactly what I meant—redistribution—

*The Hon. Mr. Bandaranaike: He is now restricting his proposal to this one point—of a redistribution of subjects.

Mr. Natesan: Yes.

*The Hon. Mr. Bandaranaike: However unsatisfactory that solution may be, when I compare it with the other solutions I shall not be in a position to oppose it. I may, as a Minister, refrain from voting, but I must say that, in view of the opinions I have expressed, with these various possibilities, I shall not feel justified myself in opposing that amendment. I have not much more to say. These, as far as I can see, are all the implications, and I expect hon. Members who will follow will further express their views and elucidate the position.

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Dr. A. P. de Zoysa (Colombo South) : Sir, the whole House ought to be grateful to the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) for bringing this motion up. He is actually voicing the sentiments of the people of this country in regard to this matter. We cannot blame the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce. It may be that he is doing his best. But the mover has pointed out the necessity for having a special Minister. All of us can understand the necessity for all attention or nearly all the attention being paid to the question of food supply not only by the Ministers, but also by all interested in public work; this is not the time to alter the Constitution. This is not the time to bring in a motion for a Cabinet Ministry.

Sir, it is very unfortunate that when a back-bencher brings in a motion the Minister concerned should begin to think that it is a motion of no-confidence. That is not so. This is a necessity which requires immediate attention. I do not think this motion was ever meant as a vote of no-confidence in the Hon. Minister. If the Ministers feel that they are over burdened with work, they should not wait till a back-bencher brings in a motion such as this. If they want a Cabinet Ministry, they should bring up that motion as a substantive one.

What we want is that the question of food supply should be taken in hand immediately. How can this be done? Just see how we have done it in the past. The Hon. Member for Trincomalee (Mr. Tambimuttu) told me that in 1920-21, in the last Legislative Council, the question came up after the last war. How did they tackle the problem then? They had a special Board appointed and there were reports made by this Board. From June, 1920, to October 9, 1927, there were several reports. From one I gather that His Excellency the Governor had appointed to this Board Mr. E. R. Tambimuttu and Mr. (late Sir) James Peiris. It is not for the Government to take the whole responsibility in food supply. In matters of emergency, and in matters of national crisis like the one with which we are confronted, we must take into a Board of Food Supplies not only Civil Servants and the Ministers but also all people who have knowledge of the rice

business, such as some importers and merchants.

The only suggestion I would make is that a Board of Food Supply—not several Boards in outstations—a Central Board for the supply of food should be created. That will solve the problem effectively. Although the Hon. Minister of Local Administration said that there were three alternatives, I say that there are four of them, the fourth being to form a Board of Food Supply. We had the Electricity Board after the last Council. [A MEMBER: It was scrapped.] It was scrapped, but it functioned. Maybe it did not function to the satisfaction of the Minister, but that does not matter. There was a Board functioning. Therefore, Sir, I propose as an amendment, that, instead of the words “Ministry of Food”, the words “Board of Food Supplies” be substituted.

The Board of Food Supplies may consist of the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce as the Chairman. If he is too busy, any other Minister may be the Chairman, say, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands. I will leave these details to the Ministers to decide. It is quite possible to appoint two Members of this Council to that Board. It is possible to invite two business men who will represent the interests of business men. Then the Government can direct them. As to what their demands are, it will be a practical matter, and, I think, it will satisfy the demands of the Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) and the Ministers, unless the hon. Member wants, by this motion, to alter the Constitution. That is entirely a different matter. If it is the food supply that we are concerned with, here is an amendment which will actually satisfy the people, and, at least, we will give the general public and the Government a chance to work together.

Therefore, Sir, I move that this motion be amended by the substitution of the words, “Board of Food Supplies”, for the words, “Ministry of Food”.

Mr. E. R. Tambimuttu (Trincomalee-Batticaloa) seconded.

Mr. Ponnambalam: On a point of order, which I am very loth to raise. It strikes me that the substitution of the words, “Board of Food Supplies” for

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the words "Ministry of Food", would be a complete negation of the motion and would hardly be considered an amendment to the motion itself. What is contemplated is definitely a Ministry and not a Board. A Ministry is definitely within the ambit of the Constitution. I would further like to state that there is nothing to prevent the present Ministry or the Food Ministry, once it is formed, from appointing a Board to advise it. But, as far as this Council is concerned, a Board of Food Supplies is hardly a matter that can affect this motion.

I would ask for your ruling as to whether that amendment is in order under this motion.

Mr. Speaker: What does the mover of the amendment say?

Dr. de Zoysa: My submission is that this amendment is quite in order. If the hon. Member's idea, judging from the other matters following, is that the policy to be decided is the question of supply—buying of food; the control of food distribution and so on—all that can be done. There is the State Mortgage Bank controlled by a Board. Therefore, while the Government will have the control, there will be the Board to advise. I am not suggesting that this is purely a non-Government matter. Government will have the necessary control, and with the co-operation of the public and the merchants, as much as possible, black-markets will be reduced. I think, if the hon. Member wants by means of this motion to do everything for best controlling food supplies, this amendment is in order. But if he wants to change the Constitution, I have nothing to say.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** For example, we have a Board of Agriculture now, but what is definitely contemplated is a Ministry of Food within the Constitution.

Mr. Natesan: We have the words, "new orientation of policy". It will not be proper for a Board of Food Control to initiate policy as contemplated by the hon. Member. It should be done by the Ministry. It will not come within this Constitution at all.

Mr. Speaker: I would like the debate to be confined to the question that is now

before us and to what is relevant to the creation of a Ministry within the Constitution. No doubt the hon. Member's amendment, taking a broad view of it, becomes relevant, but the debate has proceeded on the question of the creation of a Ministry within the Constitution, and I therefore rule the amendment of the hon. Member for Colombo South out of order.

***The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva:** Sir, I think all hon. Members will be grateful to the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam), for bringing up this motion, however inopportune it may be to do so just now. I am speaking for myself, because I see that the hon. Member is now seeing light, though he was in darkness all this time with regard to various problems affecting the advancement and welfare of this country. I congratulate him on his giving the very good reason which he did give when he introduced this motion.

The hon. Member stated to the House that there were several alternatives and that we could select one of them in order to give effect to this motion. So that, even after introducing the motion, he had not definitely made up his mind with regard to the ultimate reception which this motion would obtain at the hands of the House. But I am very thankful to him, because this motion goes to the very fundamentals of the Constitution—if you are going to have an eighth Minister appointed, without a Committee. That is why I congratulate the hon. Member. All this time the minorities have been harping on the fact that the security and good government of this country are based entirely on this Committee System of Government, and therefore they will never be safe. Now we find that the hon. Member himself says: "No use of a Committee; appoint a Minister and give him power to act as he likes. He may be only subject to the direction of this House."

Sir, the hon. Member himself felt that this was such an urgent matter that this suggestion should be implemented immediately, if there was going to be any proper administration of the question of controlling food. I ask hon. Members whether this motion can be implemented in that form.

Supposing the Council decided to have an eighth Minister, how can we implement that decision? The hon. Member himself says that a small amendment of the Constitution is necessary. That is his point of view—that a small amendment of the Constitution is necessary. I would like to ask him how he could make a small amendment to the Constitution, and give effect to this motion to create an eighth Minister. It is very difficult for us to understand how this Council has any power, according to the present Constitution, to do so.

Therefore, we must appeal to somebody else to alter the Constitution in order to give effect to this motion. Now, who is the person who is able to give effect to this recommendation? You have to go back again to the Secretary of State on bended knees and say, "We are in great difficulty; therefore please alter the Constitution on a small point, so that we may have an eighth Minister." We have appealed to the Secretary of State time after time, year after year, for small modifications. But has he ever conceded us anything? I ask hon. Members to bear that in mind.

So that the whole urgency of the matter will be taken away immediately you pass this resolution. You have to make representations to His Excellency the Governor, and His Excellency will say, "Oh, from my point of view, I cannot recommend this proposal". Or, he may recommend it. Then it will go to the Secretary of State, and he will say, "Is this a time when I can consider a question such as this? Here the Empire is fighting, fighting for its very existence, and can I amend the Constitution to give effect to this alteration that the hon. Member for Point Pedro is seeking?"

No, Sir. I would appeal to the hon. Member; let us evolve some scheme over which we will have control. Let our salvation be in our own hands. Then you would have done your best. This is not a time to go and appeal to other people. We are doing our very best. However difficult it may be, we are doing our very best—everyone—and we find it very difficult at the present moment on account of the enormous amount of work that has devolved upon us, and on account of the rigidity of the present

Constitution we cannot move. That is why I am glad that even the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) realizes this difficulty.

Can we implement this resolution immediately? All these questions are not in our hands and if we pass this resolution we will have to await the decision of somebody else which may never come within a reasonable time for us to implement this resolution. So, whilst appreciating the fact that we are not all satisfied that we have got the maximum control over the food problem, whilst we are agreed that people are dissatisfied, I feel that the solution is not to create a new Ministry and appealing to the Secretary of State to alter the Constitution, but to evolve some scheme by which we can put our heads together and see what we can do.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: What about the amendment?

***The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva:** I am coming to it. The hon. Member did not accept the amendment.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** Who told you that?

***The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva:** Well, I will go on with my speech, so that hon. Members may understand a little more what I have in mind.

The proposal that is before the House would amount to taking away the functions of a Minister and his Committee. But it is not the Minister, not the Board of Ministers, but the Members of the Executive Committee themselves who are clothed with authority under the Order in Council. Can we deprive them of that authority without radically altering the Constitution? But with regard to the allocation of functions, we can do it by means of a motion, by agreement, with the consent of the House.

That is why, Sir, I am in agreement with the idea of reallocating some of the functions which devolve upon the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce and his Committee. If the other Members of the Committee say, "Legally nobody can touch our functions", how can we alter this Constitution which has been accepted by us and worked by us for the last twelve years?

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What surprises me is this. Under this rigid Constitution, a Constitution which has been unheard of in any other civilized country, we were given a scheme of Government to work. In these circumstances of stress and strain, I ask hon. Members to realize how we have been forging ahead, without creating any rupture in this country, which speaks volumes for the capacity of the people of this country. In those circumstances, I feel that hon. Members would be justified in rejecting the motion. If hon. Members so desire, they can reallocate the functions and carry on as we are; otherwise—

***Mr. Sri Pathmanathan:** What about the amendment?

***The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva:** Had the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam), when that amendment was moved, withdrawn his original motion, perhaps there would not have been any necessity for me to speak. But he did not do that, and now I am constrained to speak on this motion.

I would like to go further and say this. These are only palliatives; they will never cure the ills that we are suffering from. You want a radical change. The only solution known to the world and accepted by wise statesmanship is Cabinet responsibility. Instead of securing that, we simply accept a few changes here and there and go along the beaten track.

If the House is divided, then of course there cannot be any agreement. But if the country is not divided, we are one and we can get everything we want. Is there any difficulty on this question now? We are all working like brothers, looking at national problems in their correct perspective. So why should we create these difficulties, imaginary difficulties, in order to retard the progress of this country?

Then I would like to say this. The Minister of Agriculture proposed and the Hon. Minister of Local Administration practically endorsed his point of view—which is also my own view—that we must make up our minds to save ourselves. That is why I appealed to hon. Members that we should ourselves evolve some scheme. It may be a temporary measure, but if temporary measures are sound and based on good judgment and the

results are convincing, then we can adhere to them. It is only apprehension of some evil that may befall the country that prevents some Members from trying to solve this problem. I say nothing will happen. Let us march together in this matter. Let us, without creating any trouble, redistribute these functions.

Sir, the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce has been the target of attack, perhaps justifiably, by the people outside. But you must consider the enormous amount of responsibility he has had to shoulder. He was expected to solve these problems with machinery that cannot be put into operation in a crisis like this. You are under obligation to Heads of Departments. You give orders to a Head of Department, and he does not implement them faithfully, and ultimately the Minister is responsible.

I am constrained therefore to ask hon. Members to consider whether the remedy proposed is a sound one. What I feel is that it does not provide a remedy. But if you wish to have a palliative, then I am in agreement with the amendment.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: As a member of the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce, I desire to offer a few remarks.

The motion of the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) raises a hornets' nest about one's ears. There is, as some Members have said in this House, the great Constitutional question behind it. Other Members confined it to a narrower issue. I desire to take his motion at its face value.

The motion states, as far as I can remember, that the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce is overburdened with work, that he has not the time to attend to all the matters connected with the food policy, especially in regard to food purchase and its distribution and its prices, and therefore the mover demands a reorientation of policy with regard to certain matters and the creation of a new Ministry.

Let us take his points one by one. I must, Sir, as a Member of the Executive Committee, offer a few words of criticism, friendly criticism. I know the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce has been overworked. In fact, all Ministers have been overworked during this time of crisis with regard to the

different matters concerning their Ministries. This is war-time, Sir. You cannot get your normal meal. If you cannot get your normal meal, how can you work? During the air raid, I remember, I could not get anything for my dinner. It was impossible to get anything. The servants had gone away, and after going from restaurant to restaurant, I came by two miserable sausages, and that was my dinner. So, in these circumstances, it is very difficult for any Minister to do his full quota of work. That is the position under the present war conditions.

The war has created new problems and they require new solutions. With regard to purchase—I would like to take that problem first—we had before our Executive Committee a resolution saying that rice purchase should be taken away from the hands of the normal merchants dealing in rice and should be brought under Government control. We have opposed that proposal in our Executive Committee always. We said that it would be most unwise to take the purchase of rice out of the hands of the merchants of the Pettah and elsewhere who from generation to generation have handled only the rice business.

The rice business, as everybody who deals in rice knows, is a very complicated and tricky business. It calls for considerable experience. Some of the merchants in the rice business have been established in the country for over a hundred years, and from father to son have done this rice business. So it is not a business that can be handled by all. A business that requires so much careful training and so much experience was placed in the hands of Government officers totally untrained to handle it, people who were only able to write minutes of meetings, handle official papers and buy at any price.

That is the fundamental mistake made by our Ministers—to take the rice business away from the hands of the established merchants and put it in the hands of Civil Servants untrained and undisciplined in business, especially in regard to rice. If we had had the Sindhi Merchants' Association, if we had had the two well-known European firms, established in India, Burma, and Ceylon,—Messrs Steel Bros. and Messrs Ralli Bros.—who have a world reputation undoubtedly they would not have made

the mistake we have made with regard to the purchase of rice.

Of course, the Minister of Agriculture will say, "All the merchants had gone away, and that was why we had to go and appoint a Civil Servant somewhere to purchase rice." That is not an argument that will hold water. There have been all the time established merchants here in Colombo who would have delivered the goods at a reasonable price. Our interfering and putting Government officers in charge of the purchase of rice, altogether altered the market in India. The prices went up, and up, and up. Immediately they knew that the Government of Ceylon were going to buy rice at any price and the people of Ceylon were short of rice, the trouble arose.

That was the fundamental mistake that was made by the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce. I do not say that he made it himself. He had the full approval of the Board of Ministers. Therefore, if we have to censure the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce for that, we have to censure the whole Board of Ministers. He should not be made the scapegoat for this unwise policy of purchase. The whole Board of Ministers should be censured, and if anybody should go, the whole Board of Ministers should go. You cannot censure one Minister and say that the rest were all right. They compelled him to take the purchase of rice out of the hands of the Sindhi merchants and from the hands of recognized European firms, and put it in the hands of Civil Servants who knew absolutely nothing about the rice trade and bungled the whole thing.

Now they are reduced to finding a scapegoat. Who is the scapegoat? If the scapegoat is the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, naturally our Executive Committee is also dragged in to share the blame. It is not one of these matters in regard to which the Executive Committee was not consulted. That is our grouse. The Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce is nothing apart from his Committee. He is only the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

The fundamental mistake the Ministers commit is to think that they are some wonderful beings who exist apart from the Executive Committees. The

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Ministers are mere nothings apart from their Committees. They are part and parcel of their Committees.

Of course, the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce would come and tell us that he had to do it in an emergency and had therefore not the time to consult us when certain important matters were discussed. If he had consulted his Committee over the question of the importation of rice he would have received valuable assistance and advice. The hon. Nominated Member (Diwan Bahadur I. X. Pereira) has been in business in this country for over 40 years, and he knows the rice merchants. Another Member of our Committee, the hon. Member for Hatton (Mr. Natesa Iyer) knows the rice merchants in South India and he also knows the ways of those merchants.

The first and foremost thing the Minister ought to have done was to consult the Executive Committee and to place the difficulties before the Committee, because he is part and parcel of the Committee. He cannot act independently of the Committee. What does the term "Minister" mean? In Latin it means "servant". Therefore, the Minister is not only the servant of the Executive Committee but is also the servant of this House; he cannot function apart from his Committee. There may be faults in the Donoughmore Constitution, but I say that that is where he went wrong, if I may say so without giving offence.

The Board of Ministers had not sufficient knowledge of this business, and without at least getting advice on this matter, they thought that the Indian merchants were making plenty of money over the rice trade, they asked themselves why they should not take over the business themselves. That was how their mind worked. If the Sindhi merchants had bought rice for Ceylon, we would have been stung a little but if Government Servants go to purchase rice we would be stung a hundred times more. I am glad to say that the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce now consults us in most matters.

Are we adjourning now, Sir? I shall require a few minutes more.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member can go on till 12 o'clock.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: Again, with regard to the distribution of rice, I do not think the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce is solely to blame. The rationing of rice had to be worked according to a programme. Was it put before our Committee? I believe he put the rationing scheme before the Committee.

***The Hon. Mr. G. C. S. Corea (Minister of Labour, Industry & Commerce):** Oh, yes.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: And we agreed to it. But the Board of Ministers made some alterations in the more vital parts of that scheme. They said that imported paddy should be paid one price but that local paddy might be sold at any price. Consequently, local paddy that was sold for about 12 cents went up to about 30 or 35 cents a measure. The Board of Ministers did not possess business acumen, and they were not able to tackle the problem satisfactorily. If you blame our Executive Committee for this state of affairs, we can blame the Board of Ministers for it; and if you propose to change the subjects under our Ministry, I say the Board of Ministers will also have to be changed for the same reason.

The proposal to form a new Ministry raises a very important Constitutional issue which cannot be decided in an off-hand way. To put that proposal into effect will involve a battle royal with the Secretary of State for the Colonies. We will have to throw the whole of the Donoughmore Constitution into the melting pot before we can achieve that object. The question of Reforms would naturally enter into such a consideration and it is too vast a subject for me to discuss today. I do not know how far the Secretary of State is prepared to alter this Constitution. Even if he consents to alter the Constitution, would he release some of his powers or further tighten the strings and take more power to himself, saying that we have not been found capable in the administration of the powers already given us and, therefore, we should not be given all the power which a free country should have?

To my mind, we must clearly know how much power the Secretary of State is willing to release. It is useless our converting this Council into a mere debating society. I do not like to have

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future promises in Constitutional matters. I know what has happened in India and in other countries with regard to promises held out. If there is going to be a release of power to the people, that power should be released immediately. We should know what percentage of power would be released. If this House is asked for its opinion in that matter, I would most respectfully and humbly ask for the release immediately of 50 per cent. of power—say 50 per cent. cash in hand—the balance 50 per cent. to be released after the war.

For the Secretary of State and the Officers of State to tell us that they would give us all that after the war is merely to cajole us as they would children. You can tell a child to wait, promising him a bon-bon. In that matter we have the past experience not only of ours but also of that great continent across the Strait, India. We know how they have been treated and we have learned many lessons. Many eminent people whom I have met have told me that they have suffered over these Constitutional questions and that we could not ourselves fight and get all that we want. They have said that if we fight, we would only get what has been given to India. They were of opinion that if we were strong enough to fight for ourselves, and if India in the meantime gets a large measure of—or total— independence or self-government, we may be able to get, 24 hours later, as much as, say, 75 per cent. of our demands.

There is no reason why we should not put our best foot forward and convert the Officers of State into Ministers. I can assure the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) that we can get a Finance Minister actually responsible to this House and say good-bye to Mr. Huxham. Then, there is the Legal Secretary. I think this House is capable of having a lawyer of great eminence to take his place as Minister of Justice. I do not think the Legal Secretary will object to that. And there is the Chief Secretary. The mere title "Chief Secretary" is a misnomer. We do not know what he is. Is he the Minister of Defence or the Minister controlling the Public Services? We do not know what he is. We want to know plainly, unequivocally, what he is.

We can only work this Constitution with Ministers who hold portfolios or, with Ministers responsible to this House, and not with mere automata, exercising power derived from somebody who is 7,000 miles away.

I remember reading in Greek History that when the Greeks were subdued, their reaction to the use of the word "subject" was appalling, indeed. They felt humiliated when called a Roman subject. According to the English Constitution, a subject is one who owes loyalty to the King; and everyone, whether English or Asiatic, owing loyalty to the King, is a subject. So, there is no odium attached to that word now, as there was during the time of the Greeks.

But surely it is humiliating to be politically subject to anybody. You cannot get away from that fact. After the war, we expect fair dealing, common sense and justice to prevail among nations. They are not the heritage of one nation. There should be common sense, fair dealing and justice as between man and man.

With regard to the hornet's nest raised by the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands raised the whole question of the Cabinet form of Government. That cannot, however, be solved by a motion of this nature. I am not certain whether the Cabinet System of Government is the only form of Government that can work for the good of a country. It is not the Cabinet System or any other system that can work for harmony and with justice in a country. It is the men who work any system that count. They should be imbued with high ideals and with a sense of fair play as between man and man.

If we have men of that type in this House, I shall go out entirely and place all my resources as a politician in their control. But, unfortunately, the charge brought against the present homogeneous Board of Ministers is that they have not been fair to citizens of another race living in another part of the Island.

The hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) says that there are no roads in his part of the country; that the roads, if any, that exist are neglected; that the children are neglected; that there are no schools which the children

[Mr. Sri Pathmanathan.] can attend to receive education; that the irrigation system has not been perfected; that whilst millions of rupees are spent on the south, nothing is done in the north; that all appointments and perquisites are on one side. I do not think that the hon. Member is wrong in saying that. There is a great amount of ill-feeling, a great amount of distrust, at the present moment, among those in the north. If the proper men get into the Board of Ministers and if they spend a few million rupees in the north, then we can all say that what the hon. Member says is not true. If that were done, the hon. Member will not have two votes in Point Pedro.

But all that depends on the men working the Constitution. It is not the Constitution itself that must be blamed for this state of affairs.

One word more. I remember in my student days reading a book entitled "Britannic Partnership" by Professor Eastwood of the University of Manchester. I believe he was a lawyer and he approved of the French saying *des qu'on écrit une constitution elle est morte*. What it means is this: as soon as a Constitution is put into writing, it is dead. The Donoughmore Constitution is dead. It is no use harping on it. On its ashes we have to resurrect, phoenix-like, a new Constitution acceptable to this Council and to this country.

It is wrong to say that the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce is overburdened with work. He has under him several capable Civil Servants functioning, and I disagree with the hon. Member for Dedigama (Mr. Dudley Senanayake) when he says that the officers under the charge of the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce have been incompetent.

***Mr. Dudley Senanayake (Dedigama):** I did not say that.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: I am quoting from the *Times* of August 8, 1942.

***Mr. Dudley Senanayake:** I said that the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce never stated that his officers were inefficient.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: I am very glad of that correction from the hon. Member. I felt that that statement was

certainly not correct. The officials under the Minister are far too hard-worked. For instance, Mr. Poulter cannot go home till late in the evening. He works in office till 10 o'clock at night.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** He is not the first man who preferred his office to his home.

Mr. Sri Pathmanathan: Then, there is Mr. Coomaraswamy, and also Mr. Walters, who has recently been appointed. They are very capable men. You cannot say that they are men who are not working hard.

I totally oppose the reallocation of subjects under the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce. The same charge that is now levelled at the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce can be levelled at other Ministries too. Take, for instance, the Minister of Communications and Works. He has put the Railway into a mess.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting is suspended till 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

Sitting accordingly suspended until 2 p.m., and then resumed.

Mr. P. de S. Kularatne (Balapitiya): I should like to speak a few words on this motion. It seemed to me that this was a very harmless motion. But apparently it is capable of being understood in many different ways and I should like therefore to propose an amendment.

***Mr. S. Abeywickrama (Udugama):** Third amendment.

Mr. Kularatne: My amendment would read as follows:

"That this Council recommends the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food within the ambit of the Constitution."

The purpose is to omit the words "with a new orientation of policy in the matter of purchase, control, price, and distribution". Those words seem to have given offence to some people. Apparently there is a feeling that there is, by implication, a vote of censure on the Minister. That is not the intention, I believe, of the mover; nor is it my intention to move a vote of censure when I support this motion.

When we ask for a new Minister, it is quite clear that the House is not satisfied with the present situation. It does not necessarily mean that we have no

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confidence in the Minister; he himself perhaps may be asked to carry on the work of the new Ministry. I think the House ought to be in a position to support my amendment because what is wanted by all of us is that something should be done.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** What should be done?

Mr. Kularatne: It seems to me that when we ask for a Ministry of Food the Board of Ministers should be able to understand our position and give us a Minister, if they agree with us in accordance with the Constitution or within the Constitution or, if necessary, even without the Constitution. They should be able to take the necessary steps to ask the Government, to ask those in authority to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution. But now, as the amendment reads, no such thing is necessary; we ask for a new Ministry of Food within the Constitution.

I move that amendment.

Mr. Speaker: The amendment proposed by the hon. Member is this:

“That this Council recommends the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food”

The hon. Member wants the word “recommends” substituted for the words “is of opinion”. The hon. Member also wants to delete all the words after the words “creation of a Ministry of Food” and substitute therefor the words “within the ambit of this Constitution”. The motion will then read:

“That this Council recommends the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food within the ambit of the Constitution.”

Mr. A. P. Jayasuriya (Horana) seconded.

Mr. Speaker: The two amendments are before the House for debate.

***Mr. E. W. Abeygunasekera (Nuwara Eliya):** I wish to make certain observations both on the main motion and the amendments. For the last 6 months motions and amendments have been moved, but nothing has been done.

In this connexion I wish to mention that the Hon. Minister of Local Administration and the Commissioner of Local

Government visited the Central Province and the Nuwara Eliya District and wanted the Village Committees to open Village Committee Depots to help the villagers.

The position is this. I am also the Chairman of a Village Committee. I have been here in Colombo for the last 3 days for the purpose of buying foodstuffs for the Village Committee Depots. We were asked to go to the Controller, Mr. J. R. Walters. We went there and wanted to buy certain foodstuffs. We had to make a deposit of Rs 1,000; we did that. Lastly, we were given permits for the purchase of Maldive fish, chillies, sugar, and some mustard, and were directed to the Manning Market for buying sugar. When we went there we were told, “We do not have sugar; you must go to the Chalmers’ Granaries”. We went there. We were told that we would have to go to Captain’s Garden—*Kapitha-watte*. Why should there be all this nonsense, Sir? This is nothing but a camouflage. I want to tell the Board of Ministers that this is bluffing the public.

Major-General Inskip said that during the last war he ate grass. He advises us to eat guinea grass. I want to know from the Board of Ministers whether they are going to advise our fellow-villagers to eat *thanakola*, *nidikumba*, and *rambuk*.

We have the highest regard for the Commissioner of Civil Defence and the Controller, Mr. J. R. Walters. There can be no doubt that they are very able men.

As I said earlier, we were asked to buy some of our foodstuffs from the Controller’s Stores. As for the rest of our requirements, we were told that we would have to go to the Pettah dealers. We went to E. G. Adamally & Co., to buy green gram and dhal. But we drew a blank. I know that the Pettah dealers have in stock many cwt. of articles like green gram and dhal. Unless and until these dealers are visited by Inspectors, and it is ascertained that their stocks are being sold to the public; no good will come out of our schemes. What is this control? It is nothing but bluff; this is cheating people; this is misleading people. Unless and until control is made effective, there will be

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riots. After all, hunger cannot be controlled either by the Controller or the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce. I do not know whether hunger can be controlled.

The Hon. Colonel J. L. Kotalawala (Minister of Communications & Works): Hunger can be controlled by food.

***Mr. Abeygunasekera:** They say that the Marketing Commissioner has only *pol-thel* and *thala-thel*—refined coconut oil and gingelly oil—and grape fruit. That is all that the Marketing Commissioner has. He has also got Ceylon *kaha*—*Lankawa kaha*—turmeric.

The Hon. Colonel Kotalawala: What about poonac?

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** Garlic cannot satisfy any man's hunger. Therefore, without wasting our precious time, something must be done. Why not ask one of the mercantile firms to take over the control scheme? Carson & Co. can do that; they would be in a position to do this work. The present control scheme is only bluff.

In fact, and in truth, I have a very great regard for the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce. But as long as he is not a merchant, he cannot do this work; he knows nothing about this food business. So is the case with the Civil Servant who is in charge of this work. There must be someone who has had experience in this kind of work.

I think we must pass the motion moved by the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) or see that something is done. Mere talk and wasting our lungs will never help. We have asked the hon. Minister to do so many things. But nothing has been done. Things are only done by halves. You will remember the slogan that things done by halves are never done well. I want to tell this House that if something is not done early, there will be serious results, which cannot be prevented easily by the Board of Ministers.

I do not want to speak at length on this motion. I would vote for any motion, whether it is moved by the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) or any other hon. Member; or I might vote for the amendment moved;

by the hon. Member for Balapitiya (Mr. Kularatne). But I want something done without further delay before the crack of doom.

Mr. G. A. H. Wille (Nominated Member): I do not intend to vote in favour of either the main motion or any of the amendments that have been put forward. I do not adopt the counsel of despair which the last speaker gave utterance to when he said that something must be done and therefore let us do it, without knowing exactly to what it will tend.

For many hours last week, and for two hours this morning we have been swimming or floundering in a sea of words. Some of the swimmers did not seem able to keep their heads above water or to do more than utter some gurgling sounds with regard to such things as the Donoughmore Constitution and Cabinet responsibility. I really do not know what these matters have to do with this practical affair that is before us.

I would not have risen to speak but for a remark made by a previous speaker that we must show the country, by adopting the main motion, that we realize the gravity of the situation. I do not think that the main motion offers us anything like a haven of security in the very difficult, if not dangerous, position in which we are placed. For myself, I feel that we should not lose our heads. Let us realize the difficulty of the task the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce has to perform, and let us calmly decide to give a chance to the step that His Excellency has taken, namely, to place a co-ordinating officer at the head of the various Departments under the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce.

The main motion speaks of a re-orientation of policy. That is a nice rotund phrase. I do not know really what it implies. To me it seems that we have only one policy; at least we can have only one policy in this matter, and that is to see that there is an adequate supply of food and that efficient measures are taken to secure that the distribution takes place smoothly and without any undue advantage to certain persons and undue disadvantage to certain others. There is no room for a new policy. What has been wanting is not a new policy, but perhaps more successful measures in order to carry out the common policy.

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One of the arguments used has been that we must have a full-timer as Minister of Food. I do not appreciate that argument. After all, the man who dictates policy does not require to keep his nose to the grindstone. His business is to lay down an intelligent policy and to see that those under him carry it out. Now, in the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce, under whom His Excellency has placed the Civil Defence Commissioner as Director of Food Supply—

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** Has he?

Mr. Wille:—you find the hon. Member for Matara (Mr. Hewavitarne), a man who has spent his life in business. There is also the Nominated Member (Mr. Newnham). Then there is the hon. Member for Mannar-Mullaivivu (Mr. Sri Pathmanathan), who was once I think our Trade Commissioner. There is the Nominated Member (Diwan Bahadur I. X. Pereira), who has been a merchant of no less than forty years' standing, and there is the Member for Hatton (Mr. Natesa Iyer), who has had a good deal to do with food questions and who is acquainted with India, from which place we expect to receive our food supply. Now, with the new Director of Food Supply acting in consultation with a Committee such as that, I think we should have some hope of things being better than they have been in the past.

I do not see that with the appointment of a new Food Ministry, whether it is a Ministry consisting of an Executive Committee or a Minister alone—all these suggestions have been made—we are going to fare very much better. We must make allowance for this fact, that the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce has had an unprecedented piece of work in this matter. He has not only had an unprecedented piece of work, but he has been up against human nature. There is the selfishness of people to fight against. There is the dishonesty of profiteers and others, and there are hoarders. So that a large measure of allowance has to be made if the policy laid down has not been carried out successfully.

As to policy there is no room, as I said, for a new re-orientation of policy. Let us see that the work is done properly and

I think we ought to give the new Director of Food Supply a chance to work out things successfully. He will have under him a number of Heads of Departments. The hon. Member for Mannar-Mullaivivu (Mr. Sri Pathmanathan) has explained to us how hard and how enthusiastically some of these officers who are Heads of Departments under the Ministry are working. So that we should not lose heart and at the same time lose our heads and go in for measures which involve Constitutional changes, at least if some of the suggestions that have been made are going to be adopted.

Sir, the main thing to strive for is an adequate food supply. I trust that, although I have not been in favour of our Ministers making journeys to India, the result of the Leader of the House going to India will be to secure us our food supply, which is said to be in danger. That is only with regard to the supplies coming from outside, but what about the food that is expected to be produced in this Island? What about our rice supply? What about our food production generally? As I said the other day, it is high time that we had periodical reports from the Minister of Agriculture as to what is being produced in this country. We do not know how we stand, and the public mind is getting very anxious. Let us not merely lose heart and lose our heads and think that by appointing a Food Ministry we are going to solve the whole problem of food supplies as well as other details in connexion with food distribution.

It is no use indulging in lengthy discussions on our Constitution. Much has been said against the present Constitution, as if that is responsible for the failure of measures that have been taken to distribute food. Neither the Constitution nor the policy has had anything to do with the causes of our present dissatisfaction. It is almost inherent in the nature of the work to be done that there should be difficulties and these difficulties can be overcome if we have a little patience.

The Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, if he has too much to do can shear himself of some of his additional duties like, for instance, rural reconstruction. But his experience in this matter of food, his very failures and mistakes

[Mr. Wille.]

and the failures and mistakes of his Committee will be of great service to the new Director of Food. He will have to build on what has been done, improving things as far as possible as he goes along. But let us not waste our time in this Assembly, when we have practical difficulty before us, in discussing questions of great Constitutional reform. That will savour of Nero fiddling while Rome is burning. I certainly do not take a light view of the present situation, and because of that I say that there should not be a disturbance in the present arrangements, supplemented as they have been by the appointment of the Director of Food.

***Mr. S. Vytilingam (Talawakele):** Sir, if the original motion of the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) was a censure motion as it was interpreted to be by some previous speakers, I would have registered my protest and voted against it. I do not consider it to be a vote of no-confidence in the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce. I know that the Minister has done his best under the circumstances, but I feel that a Minister who will be in charge of food production as well as price control only will be better able to solve the problem of food distribution in this country. Food production is in the hands of one Minister and price control and food distribution is in the hands of another Minister. There is very little co-ordination in these matters between these two Ministries.

You will remember, Sir, that the question of the purchasing of local food supplies has often been brought up in this Council by the hon. Member for Matale (Mr. Aluwihare) as well as other Members, and they have demanded that the local producer should be paid the same price as was being paid for the same imported food. I know as a matter of fact that to-day kurakkan imported from India is being bought and hoarded by traders in this country at the rate of Rs. 36 per bag of 3½ bushels. What is the price paid to the local producers? The Government consider that Rs. 4.50 a bushel is a very high price and that they ought not to pay that price to-day; but the imported article comes into this country at about Rs. 11 a bushel. That is the

price the importer pays. I do not know at what price he is going to sell it to the consumer. Profiteering is rampant, and even racketeering is going on in the matter of foodstuffs.

I shall give you one or two instances. There was great publicity given with regard to the consumption of wheat flour and we were given to understand that we had in this country sufficient wheat flour to last us months or even years. But where is all this wheat flour? It has vanished. If you go to the market to buy wheat flour, you are asked to pay about double or treble the controlled price.

Mr. U. Batuwantudawe (Kalutara): It is not available at all.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** It was stated that there was flour to last us for months.

***Mr. Vytilingam:** It is not that the wheat flour has been consumed. There is a certain quantity of wheat flour, it is being hoarded and merchants are demanding high prices. I am told that it is the policy of the Government, as soon as these commodities come in, to distribute them to the primary distributors. They are a handful of people, moneyed men, and they buy up the stock. They do not distribute it all over the country. They hoard it; and once they know that the Government stocks are over, they demand high prices for the commodity.

Take the case of bajri. Large quantities of it were imported by the Marketing Department, and the Department advertised in the newspapers that anybody could apply for bajri and would be sold the commodity at a price of Rs. 9.75 a cwt. What actually happened? Very large quantities of bajri went into the hands of primary distributors. They bought up the stocks at Rs. 9.75 a cwt. They did not allow this bajri to be distributed all over the country. Once they know that the Marketing Department or other Government Departments do not have any more bajri for sale, they will demand higher prices for it. Last week my hon. Friend the Nominated Member (Mr. Griffith) wanted some bajri, and I made inquiries in the market. I was quoted Rs. 30 for a bag of 200 lb., whereas it cost only Rs. 17.41 when they

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bought it from Government. Yesterday, or the day before, the price had gone up to Rs. 38 for a bag of 200 lb. or $3\frac{3}{4}$ bushels.

This racketeering is going on in the country, and I am sorry that nothing has been done. It is very difficult for a Minister who is burdened with other duties to keep an eye on these abuses and remedy the situation. As the Hon. Minister of Local Administration suggested, I want a Minister who will always think of food, dream of food, eat food and who will be able to solve the problem of food supply in the country.

I would suggest that Courts be established at every street-corner in the Pettah to deal with profiteers summarily. I am sure we have very good material in our university and our students can be asked at least for some time to check up the prices of foodstuffs and report the matter to the Courts immediately, and the Courts could deal with them at once. It is impossible to expect people who come from outstations especially traders to make complaints, and then go before the Courts and give evidence and prove charges. It is very difficult to prove charges of profiteering. What happens is that when you go to a trader and ask for a commodity, he puts down the controlled price of the commodity on the receipt and for the balance he puts down "Cash paid". So that there is no documentary evidence to prove profiteering.

I would therefore urge that, by the re-allocation of functions under the present Constitution, a Ministry of Food be formed whose sole duty would be to look after food distribution, food production, food supply and price control.

Mr. G. R. de Silva (Colombo North) : I do not want on this occasion to give a silent vote as I have always had strong views on this question. I think in my Budget speech I foresaw the need for a Ministry of Food; although I sought to achieve my purpose through a Central Board of Control with feeder Boards at outstations instead of an actual Ministry of Food.

This motion has been interpreted in so many varied and divergent ways that it is somewhat strange that no one has looked at it from the point of view of its actual implications. The motion starts

as follows: "That this Council is of opinion that the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food"—and so on. Now what are the actual implications of the words I have quoted? The implications are not merely that the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce is indistinct, but all the Ministers, as a body, stand indicted under this motion.

The item entitled "Food" does not apply to the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce alone; there is the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands which is responsible for a large portion of the food that we get in this country. As far as I am concerned, if this motion is considered a motion of censure against any individual, I think it is a vote of censure against the Board of Ministers, because so many of our Ministers have come forward and tried to dabble in the food problem. There is another Minister taking it up now, and two others have already played their part in it. I think, the Minister of Local Administration is also dabbling in food production. So that if at all you can call this motion a vote of censure it is clearly against the entire Board of Ministers.

As a matter of fact, I think this motion should be really aimed against the Board of Ministers, because they were responsible during the last six months at least for all the steps taken regarding food supply. They were fully in touch, I think, with the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, and many a time that Minister has come before this House and said, "When I put certain matters before the Board of Ministers, sometimes they have agreed with me and sometimes they have not". So that it is not, at this moment, proper for any of us to visit the responsibility on the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce alone. In fact, the Board of Ministers, I think, realized the implications, since for once we have seen Minister after Minister getting up and trying to defend themselves because they felt that they were equally responsible, and in fact they are equally responsible for this state of things.

Food is an important question, and taking the implications of this motion as it stands, it means that we want certain matters taken out of the hands of the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce in the same way as certain

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functions have been taken out of the hands of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands. I think even the Leader of the House has sent out (Emergency) Assistant Government Agents to attend to measures of food production. So that if we take that fact into consideration we will realize that this is a motion which directly affects the activities of a number of Ministers. And, I think, this is appreciated by every Member of this House. I have always felt that in this matter of food no one Minister can be singled out for blame.

An attempt was made, I think, a few days ago, to co-ordinate the work of these different Ministries, and it seems to me—we are only back-benchers and we do not know what is happening in the holy of holies—that no attempt had been made all these days to find out what supplies of food we have in this country and that it is only now that an attempt is being made to find out what supplies of food we have in the country. Until now no attempt has been made to find that out.

So that I would like to point out that when the mover in his motion speaks of a "Ministry of Food", he really wants certain work taken out of the hands of at least three people—the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands and even the Minister of Home Affairs, who directs (Emergency) Assistant Government Agents in charge of food measures.

This is a point which everyone feels. Why, even the Board of Ministers say, "Something has to be done"; every Member of this House says, "Something has to be done", and the question now before us is how it is to be done?

Then again I for one feel that the real flaw in our policy of food control is the fact that the work has been solely and entirely entrusted to Government channels. As somebody remarked, there are eleven Civil Servants engaged in the work to-day, and through whom do they carry on affairs in the Provinces? Through the Chief Headmen and the other Headmen. The whole system of food control is worked through certain Government channels without even consulting the representatives of the people who can give sound advice; and if you want to know, one feels that all

the hoarding is done by these very people who are supposed to be in charge of food control.

I, therefore, appreciate very much those words "of a new orientation in the method of purchase, control". A change or orientation of policy should therefore take place. I tried to make that point quite clear in my Budget speech. I said on that occasion that we should have Boards of Control at different spots, because to-day you will find that the person who is in charge at different spots is a Government officer who goes through his work as a matter of routine. There is no such thing as finding out whether the food reaches the people. They just do it as a matter of routine, and until there is that re-orientation of policy with all the responsibilities pertaining to food being centred in one person who will be Minister of Food, or whatever you might call him—I think, the words Minister-in-Charge of Food would cover the whole field—no satisfactory result can be expected. We have food that is grown in this country on the one side, and we have food that is imported from elsewhere, and we will not know exactly what stock of food we have in the country to get along with, unless we make our own arrangements without reference to the food we may get from elsewhere.

I for one feel that the time has come for us not to think of getting food from outside, but to think of conserving the food in this country and to distribute it in such a way as to see that everybody receives it. If things become really bad, we will all have to face the consequences.

I do not want to stray into questions of Constitutional procedure, but I do not mind admitting that as far as I am concerned I am prepared to go as far as making it clear that we should even appoint a man entirely outside this Council to be in charge of food, because, I think, it is a national emergency. England at the start of the war took steps to appoint as Food Minister one who was not even a Member of Parliament. It may be said that their Constitution is not so rigid as ours, but I do not think such arguments really matter. What really matters is that the people of this country should get the food. The situation is critical and dangerous, and must be

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tackled in a manner best calculated to serve the purpose and capable of ready and swift application.

As I said earlier, I am prepared to go further and say that we should appoint a man who is not even responsible to this House if he can do the job, because after all what we want is that a proper job should be done. If anyone asks me, I can say that the whole thing has been a bungle from start to finish, and the responsibility for that must lie at the door of the Board of Ministers. They saw this trouble coming, but each one said, "Oh; this is not my job; this is somebody else's job." No co-ordinated effort was made, although occasionally we find the Board of Ministers saying, "We vote together". But they made no attempt to do something that would be in the larger interests of this country.

I would therefore suggest that we do not drop the words "a new orientation of policy". By change of policy, I do not mean policy in the very narrow sense of the term, but a change of policy in the sense of how to control and purchase; and unless there is a change of that policy of working through certain recognized channels, we would not be able to get any further.

I do not want to speak longer, as I do not wish to take up more of the time of the House. I would ask the Board of Ministers seriously to consider the motion in the light of what I said on the question of a Ministry of Food, which may mean the taking away of work from so many Ministers and putting it into the hands of one Minister. I certainly would not mind a redistribution of any sort, provided a single Ministry is left to tackle the food problem and that alone.

Mr. D. Wanigasekera (Weligama): In normal times we used to import about 6,000,000 bags of rice into this country and the sources through which we were able to secure about 5,000,000 bags of rice have dried up—countries like Burma, Indochina, &c. India never sent us more than 1,000,000 bags of rice a year, and even at the time that she was sending us this quantity, she herself was buying at least Rs. 120,000 worth of rice from Burma and other countries.

To-day the position has entirely altered. We cannot, I think, blame the

Minister simply because he has failed to carry out the duties that were expected of him. That was due to various reasons. We had for the last 100 years established a system of importation and distribution of rice in this country, and where ordinarily merchants used to import the rice and distribute it, by a single stroke of the pen, as soon as we introduced control, we got rid of the system that had existed for the last 100 years and entrusted that work to a Minister already burdened with other work. It is no wonder that the whole scheme has failed, bringing in its wake so much suffering and heart-burning, and mismanagement all round. The Minister should have got a number of experienced merchants and others who were experts in the trade to handle the situation in order to bring order out of chaos. Instead, Civil Servants who are not masters of trade or who do not know the different tricks of the trade were all of a sudden placed in charge of various Departments, and they could never have brought order out of chaos.

The merchants themselves, who were also the importers, were the people who bought up, in most cases, all the available stocks and hoarded the commodities, with the result that the Government machinery was paralysed, and as a consequence millions of people living in the country are suffering to-day. The position is very grave and acute. Even with the creation of a Food Ministry it will take a long time to put matters right, but unless we create some machinery of that type, even what we have to do in the future will not be done in a proper and systematic way.

Another thing we should do is to see that as much food as we need is grown in this country. Although we are sending our Leader to India I do not think that just now he will be in a position to obtain the rice that we are expecting from India. The position in India itself is now very grave. If the civil disobedience campaign is launched in a very serious form, and the whole machinery of Government becomes more or less paralysed, I do not think we can expect to get a grain of rice from India.

Sir, what are we to do? I read a report in the papers the other day that

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America had had a bumper crop of wheat which would be sufficient for two or three years, and that they also had even a record crop of soya bean. This war is a war in which the Allies are fighting together, and in the case of a small country like Ceylon consideration must be paid for obtaining for her food supplies either from Australia or America or from some other source, if India fails. I do not think we should depend on India alone for our food supply. We should demand that the Imperial Government should approach America or Australia and see that our foodstuffs are imported at an early date. I think, if this question is not properly tackled, it would lead to rioting and serious trouble in this country.

Dr. M. C. M. Kaleel (Colombo Central): To my mind the resolution before the House is a very simple one, and the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan) has made it simpler still by his amendment.

Almost all Members seem to be agreed that the food question at present is in a very serious state, and that it must be tackled immediately as a very urgent matter. Then, Members are also agreed that this food question must be tackled, not by any outside authority, but by a Minister who will be responsible to this House.

If the Minister of Agriculture and Lands has certain hidden fears with regard to this resolution, it is certainly not the fault of the mover of this motion. He has, for instance, raised the question of Constitutional reforms, such as a new form of Government with Cabinet responsibility and various other things, and he has also frightened the Member for Matale (Mr. Aluwihare) by saying that very soon the mover and he will come to fight one another tooth and nail on this question.

The hon. Burgher Nominated Member (Mr. Wille) who, for instance, is the only Member who stands for the present *status quo*, stated that the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce consists of some of the ablest business men in the House. I should like to know whether these Members in that Ministry have been consulted and their advice taken on every important measure which

the Minister has undertaken. I understand that these Members of the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce have been ignored in various ways and the Minister has been acting on his own. However clever and able those Members may be, they cannot help the Minister if they are ignored.

Sir, just at the start of the food crisis, I happened to be going round the Pettah one day, and I met some of the rice merchants. I do not agree with the Minister of Agriculture and Lands when he says that a number of the rice merchants ran away, and that after the bombs fell the others also bolted and therefore the Ministry had to take steps to get the rice down.

In fact, just before the bombing took place, some of the rice merchants whom I saw were frantically sending telegrams to their agents in India, and I read the replies that they received. The rice was there and they had the means of sending it. But it was the Government that put all the obstacles in the way, with the result that they were not given permission to bring down the rice to Ceylon. So that, they felt that their remaining in Ceylon and carrying on their trade was useless. They were hindered in every possible way by both the Governments of India and of Ceylon, and so they thought that it was time for them to depart. Therefore when the bombs fell, it was like almost the last straw that broke the camel's back.

I understand that when the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce went to India to negotiate, the Indian Government promised to send the necessary food to Ceylon, not 100 per cent. of the requirements, but what was urgently required, on one condition, namely, that the normal trade channels were utilized by the Government of Ceylon. Now, I would like to know whether the normal trade channels, that is, the services of the rice traders, were utilized. I do not think the Minister utilized these normal trade channels. Instead, our Government began to deal directly with the Government of India, and they went to a newly-started firm which had no experience of importing rice, ignoring the experienced traders. I could understand it if the Minister had got hold of Ceylonese traders who had started a new firm. I could understand

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it if he had placed his orders with such a firm in order to help Ceylonese. But I hear that this newly-established firm was started by certain Indians who had no previous experience in the rice trade and who formed a limited liability company for the purpose of getting down rice from India. I also understand that a very high percentage of commission was promised to these people.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** By whom?

Dr. Kaleel: By the Minister.

They were promised that the rice would be bought at the prices ruling at the time although the firm had bought it in the cheapest market possible. It is no wonder that the price of rice went up so fast and so rapidly.

As for the motion itself, I would like again to repeat that it is not necessary to read hidden meanings into it. It is a straightforward resolution that every Member wants to have passed, and I do not see that if it is adopted—at least if the amendment of the Member for Kankasanturai is adopted—there will be any difficulties about the Constitutional issue at all. All that he says is that this particular subject of food imports should be taken away from the control of the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce and placed in the hands of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, who is responsible for the production of food. [*Interruption*] I remember the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan) suggesting that the subject of food imports should be placed in the hands of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands. I personally do not mind which Minister takes it up.

I do not mind this subject being left in the hands of the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, who has already had some experience in the matter. He may have blundered, but that is another reason why he should be placed in control of this subject—because we always learn by experience. I would suggest that the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce be divested of all other responsibilities, such as the various other Departments he is in charge of, and given only this subject of food to administer and be entirely responsible for it.

I do not know whether the newly-appointed food chief—I do not know exactly what he is called—is still the Civil

Defence Commissioner. I hear that he says he is the Civil Defence Commissioner and that food control work is simply a part of the work of the Civil Defence Commissioner, and that it was only under those circumstances that he was prepared to take up this post. I cannot vouch for the truth of that statement. But what I suggest is that the new food chief be placed under the Minister of Food, the new Minister who is going to be created, and that the Minister of Food be responsible to this House.

I would therefore vote for the amendment of the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan).

***The Hon. Mr. G. C. S. Corea (Minister of Labour, Industry & Commerce):**

Sir, I would be less than human if I did not express my grateful thanks to the Members of this House for the assurances given by almost every speaker that this motion was not in any way to be considered as a motion of censure or condemnation. That was the mind of the mover of the motion also. Well, I mention that in order to say that I appreciate the fact that Members of this House have given expression to that view because they realized what the work of food control meant, and I believe they felt that whatever it was possible to do had been done.

I have not the slightest objection—in fact I would welcome it—to this House considering the food situation very fully and coming to any decision which is in the larger interests of the country, irrespective of any question of personality. I shall not therefore ask you to consider that I do this or take any personal factor into consideration, because I feel equally with you that if there is a problem of grave importance facing this country, it is the problem of food production as well as proper distribution.

There have been some amendments moved to this motion, but before I refer to those amendments or to the motion itself I hope you will permit me to refer in broad detail to some of the work that has been done in connexion with food control, because undoubtedly the words in the motion which the Member for Bala-pitiya (Mr. Kularatne) seeks to cut out by his amendment convey at any rate an implied charge of inefficiency which

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might be interpreted as some kind of censure. However, I want to explain to the House the steps so far taken with a view to acquainting the House with the actual work done and whether on those lines there is any need for any re-orientation of policy in regard to the subjects mentioned, that is, with regard to purchase, distribution and control.

Before I deal with that, I would like to refer to certain observations made by the hon. Member for Colombo Central (Dr. Kaleel). He appears to have been misinformed, and I would like to correct him. In the first place, it is quite incorrect to say that the Government placed any obstacles in the way of the rice-importing merchants to prevent them from carrying out their desire to import rice from Burma.

Dr. Kaleel: From India. I did not refer to Burma at all.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I thought he referred to some "troublesome days when frantic telegrams were sent."

With regard to imports from India, there was no interference by this Government with any attempt by any single merchant to import rice. On the contrary, every encouragement was given to these people to import rice.

Dr. Kaleel: Did the Indian Government give the necessary licence facilities to export rice to Ceylon?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I will at this stage take up the thread of my remarks in regard to a part of the motion before us.

The House must remember that the subject of food control in an emergency is included in the schedule of subjects allocated to the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce, and that necessarily meant that action could be taken under that only during an emergency, as a result of war, famine or some such occurrence. My Executive Committee took the earliest possible step that any reasonable person or body could have been expected to take in preparation for an emergency.

As long ago as the middle of 1938—

Mr. Newnham: Before that.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** About the time of the Munich crisis—

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** October, 1938?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:**—about that time we felt that owing to the European situation, although we were so far away, although no one at that time could have conjured up visions of a conflict with Japan, or of the war coming so close to our doors as has happened, we felt that there was potential danger to us in the happenings of Europe at that time, and we took action in order to create within Ceylon as large a reserve of rice as was possible for the security of its people.

I am not trying to place any blame on anybody, but hon. Members will recall that, when a Bill in this connexion was introduced in the House, the House would not, could not, take it seriously. The House would not, at that time, give us the power to create the reserve, and the result was that the Bill had to be withdrawn. Later, about the beginning of 1939—about March, 1939—when events were again developing fast in Europe, I brought this Bill back to the House and explained the urgency and the necessity for the step proposed, and the House passed the Bill and gave us the necessary authority.

We began taking action under that law in July, 1939, in order to build up a reserve. At that time, hon. Members might remember, this country had never in stock at any time more imported rice than was sufficient for more than seven days' consumption. We never created a reserve; we were living on the imports arriving from day to day; we were leading a hand-to-mouth existence in the matter of imported rice. We never had at any time stocks of rice sufficient to last us for more than a week.

By our action we created, without cost to Government, by using the import merchants themselves, a reserve of rice which was sufficient for the needs of this country for very nearly two months. Does that disclose negligence on the part of my Executive Committee or want of consideration of the difficulties that were likely to arise? Does that not show that we shouldered the responsibility cast on us in regard to a function allocated to our Executive Committee, not as a definite subject coming within the scope of

our work, but as a matter which might become its concern in the event of an emergency? Is it not an indication that every possible step, in early anticipation of what might happen, was taken by us to build up a reserve? I am referring here only to rice, because that is the important item. We took similar action to build up reserves of other articles, but I am confining my remarks to rice.

We created that reserve right down to the time when imports from Burma completely ceased. Not merely that, as soon as war became imminent in the East, we took action to supply ourselves with a large quantity of rice and paddy from Burma. We placed orders with the merchants there, and when we could not get supplies owing to certain difficulties the traders experienced, we placed very large orders with the Government of Burma. We wanted rice and paddy, and we asked the Government of Burma to send the quantities ordered.

But events moved very swiftly, and we were caught up by those events, undoubtedly. Events moved so rapidly in Malaya and Burma that even before Burma fell, when we had bought rice and it was ready for shipment both at Rangoon and Akyab, it was impossible to move that rice because events progressed more swiftly than we had anticipated. Certainly we were to a large extent caught unawares. But we could not have done anything more than we did in the circumstances.

To-day, by force of circumstances, whoever undertakes to supply the people of this country with imported rice must necessarily depend on India and India alone for whatever rice we can get. When the Burma supplies were cut off, what steps did our Executive Committee take? Did it take all the possible steps which any reasonable man or body could be expected to take? That is the criterion on which your judgment must be based, the fact on which your judgment must be based. Did the Executive Committee take every possible step which you would expect any reasonable body charged with responsibility to take? I say that there can be no other answer but that every possible step was taken. I will give the facts and prove that every step possible has been taken with regard to supplies of rice from India as soon as supplies from Burma became impossible.

The first step was taken in December last year, within a few days or weeks of the entry of Japan into the war. We sent out a special officer to find out what supplies of rice were available and to make arrangements for the purchase of as much rice as could be obtained. I may be wearying the House with these details, but the House should hear me on this point and know these facts.

In addition to dispatching this officer to India, the Ceylon Trade Commissioner in Bombay was authorized to purchase as much rice as was possible. That question was considered by the Board of Ministers as an emergency measure, and the Board approved of this step. An order was sent by the Chief Secretary on behalf of the Board of Ministers. We got into touch with the Trade Commissioner in Bombay by telephone, and both the Financial Secretary and I discussed the matter with the Trade Commissioner and gave him authority to buy as much as he possibly could.

What was the result? Within three months these two officers were able to purchase for us 45,000 tons of rice. That quantity was purchased by these two officers between January and March this year. I can give these figures now, although I did not want to give them earlier, because they relate to rice which has arrived and gone into consumption. These two officers bought 45,000 tons within that period.

The Government of India did not approve of the operations of these two officers. I may add that during this time we never placed any restrictions on the merchants who were importing as much as they could themselves, in addition to the quantity purchased by the Government. One difficulty did arise in India, and that was that owing to the entry of this Government into the market to make these purchases, the price began to rise. The Government of India then came on the scene and said that they did not approve of the system, and they took steps to prohibit further purchase of rice by our officers. That led to the visit of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands to India. Whatever people may say with regard to Ministers going to India, this country must be grateful to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands in this connexion. It must be appreciated that the Government of India had

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 put a ban on the sale of rice to Ceylon through the Trade Commissioner and others who had bought 45,000 tons already, and that we were in danger of losing that quantity.

But the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, by his arrangement with the Government of India, was able to ensure a supply from India of 38,000 tons a month. That was a definite step forward in order to keep this country supplied with rice. If that quantity of 38,000 tons a month arrived in Ceylon we would have actually been getting the same quantity of rice as we imported in normal times from Burma and India, less only 10 per cent. We would have received a quantity of rice which would have very largely solved our difficulties and our problems.

Unfortunately, owing to the arrangement arrived at, that the rice should be obtained through normal trade channels, and owing to certain delays in the issue of authority to traders to export, we were not able to obtain the rice. The Minister of Agriculture and Lands returned in the middle of March this year. He had accomplished his task up to a point, but during the rest of March we did not get any rice on the licences issued. We waited till early April, and when the question became so acute—we were granted 38,000 tons a month without the necessary machinery to collect that quantity and bring it to Ceylon—we were certainly alarmed.

The result was that the Board of Ministers decided that I should go and see that these licences were issued and that the necessary organization was set up in order to get the rice moved into Ceylon. I took up the matter with the Government of India, and the Government of India then began issuing licences from the middle of March. The Government of Ceylon had no say in that matter. The Government of India began the issuing of licences, and from the middle of April we were able to and began to collect the rice.

Out of the rice that was allocated to us from the Sind Province or Karachi District, during the months of April, May and June, we were able to buy 32,000 tons. This is in addition to the 45,000 tons I referred to earlier. Under

the same arrangement, we were able to buy 40,000 tons of rice during the same period from Madras. So that, in all, for the first six months of this year, we bought about 135,000 tons of rice from India alone.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** What was the quantity purchased?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** We bought 135,000 tons of rice, which is really equal to about half the normal supply to this country.

I gave you those figures in order to show that the only possible place we could have obtained rice from was India, and that we had discussed matters with the Indian Government. We have followed the agreement that was reached, and we are trying our best to obtain the rice. There has been delay, certainly, because we had to depend on the normal trade channels. As a result of that, the latest development is that the Government of Madras, with our full approval, has undertaken to purchase and supply Ceylon with the quantity allotted from Madras, which is a fixed quantity now. You do not want a re-orientation of policy.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Then why is the Leader of the House going to India?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I am referring to Madras. Then, with regard to the question of Sind, there are difficulties which I do not want to go into in detail; but we cannot get rice from there at present. Therefore we are trying to obtain rice from other places where we have a fairly reasonable hope of getting it because of the reasonable attitude which the Central Government of India has taken up. That is the position with regard to rice purchase in India.

The point I am making is that every possible step that could have been taken was taken in order to secure rice from India. We cannot move the Government of India to give us more than 38,000 tons of rice at the present moment. We do not want to do that. We know that India has a deficit herself. We know that India has to supply rice, not only to Ceylon but also to other countries in other parts of the world and, knowing the position, we do not want to ask India for more than 38,000 tons of

rice. We have tried to obtain as much rice as possible in the past with the help and assistance of the Government of India. Therefore, you will see that we have not left anything undone with regard to obtaining rice from India.

Then, what about other foodstuffs? We have left nothing undone. Take the case of the most important commodity which we need to make up for the deficiency in the quantity of rice. It is wheat and wheat flour. We took steps at a very early date to place very large orders with Australia. We did not neglect the importation of wheat flour. There was the possibility that wheat flour would be wanted.

When we placed these orders and imported large quantities of flour, the Mayor of Colombo, who discussed certain matters in my Office, said, "You have done the most idiotic thing in ordering such a large quantity of flour. The only thing is for you to bury your officers in the flour that you have imported." He was amazed. The quantity ordered was not such an extraordinarily large quantity. We had a certain amount of flour coming in every month. We had placed an order for wheat. It was certainly a larger order than a normal one, but we felt justified in placing that large order because we knew and felt that it might become necessary, whenever there was a sudden shortage of rice to fall back on wheat and wheat flour.

We placed those orders, and not only did we have that flour and wheat, but we also took steps to divert to Ceylon certain ships which were carrying wheat and wheat flour to other countries, and we were able to secure those supplies.

Therefore, I claim that my Committee did not neglect that aspect of the question. They did whatever was possible so as to obtain supplies. Then, we have taken the further precaution now of placing very much larger orders. I do not think I need say anything more, but the House can take it from me that we have placed very much larger orders and that we are not only getting a large quantity monthly but are also taking further steps to secure a large increase monthly—a special supply, which will enable us to keep a reserve in addition to the monthly supply of wheat as well as of wheat flour.

Sir, the question has been raised as to what happened to the flour we obtained. We were dealing with almost an unknown factor. We did not know what the attitude of the public would be towards accepting flour. As I told you before, we had a very large quantity of flour in stock.

We had to get the consumers to take it as otherwise it would have gone bad. We knew that the normal Ceylon consumption of flour had been assessed at about 1,500 tons a month, and we calculated that owing to the increased floating population present in Ceylon, we should put the normal consumption at 3,000 tons a month.

On that basis we had sufficient flour to last us for about eight or nine months, and we were compelled, because the flour might go bad in our hands, to advertise very largely to the effect that wheat flour was good as a substitute for rice and we advised everybody to take flour. We freely issued it to the public, with the result that it has been distributed all over the country. It has gone to different people—to estates, large dealers, members of the public; in fact, to everybody.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** The distribution is faulty.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** It is very easy to say so after the event. I could have doled the flour out; I could have rationed it; I could have issued it through the various departments; I could have distributed it through the Controller. But I did not want to do that. Whether it was right or wrong, we had to take a decision, and that was when we had built up such a large stock of flour that it might have gone bad in our hands if the public did not take it. Therefore we had to issue it and encourage the public to use it. It is certainly possible for anyone afterwards to say that it was a wrong decision; that we should not have issued the flour in that way but we should have gradually doled it out. I am telling you frankly the step we took and the reason for it.

We were afraid that we were taken unawares, because 16,000 tons of flour were disposed of in less than a month. But we did not distribute all the stock we had. We still have our stock which we have had to look after more carefully in view of that large disposal. It is the stock which we were keeping until the

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next stock arrived. We are issuing the flour now in a more restricted manner. It is being made available in restricted quantities to the people who require it, such as the bakers and the retail dealers.

There is no doubt that owing to the restriction there is a shortage at the moment. But this shortage will not be experienced for long unless something untoward happens. The stock we have ordered is quite sufficient to keep this country well supplied with flour and wheat. The Hon. Minister of Health reminds me that if that flour was not distributed and it went bad, Members would have asked why public money had been wasted. But these are the circumstances in which that action was taken.

Therefore, in regard to substitute foods, like wheat and wheat flour, my Committee cannot be blamed for not having taken any action beforehand and for not taking all reasonable action which any person should have taken under those circumstances.

Take the case, again, of sugar. We had certain difficulties. We had a shortage. The system of distribution broke down. When the source of supply, that is Java, failed suddenly, almost precipitately, owing to the swift developments in the Eastern theatre of war, what did my Committee do? Did they sit down and say, "Sugar has failed, what shall we do?" We did not stop there. We took every step possible; we telegraphed to all the authorities we could get in touch with—the countries that supply us with sugar—and we obtained a fairly large supply from those countries. We obtained sugar from wherever it was available. We were even able to break through or rather to surmount the convention governing the export of sugar from India, and we obtained sugar from there and from other countries as well.

Then we had to plan the distribution of sugar. At a certain period there was very great dislocation, because we were not willing and we were not going to release the stock we had in hand so long as the old sugar was available. It was only after the old sugar had been exhausted that we released the sugar we had in hand. I am not dealing at the moment with the distribution of sugar.

I am again making this point, that in regard to sugar also my Executive Committee did not sit tight and failed to take necessary action but that they did everything reasonable and humanly possible in order to secure that necessary article of food.

The same story applies to other commodities, such as currysuffs, and so on. Direct importation was undertaken, and encouragement was given to importers till we found that the supplies coming in were fairly satisfactory.

Now, while hon. Members are listening to me on that point, can they have forgotten the circumstances at the time when those actions had to be taken? The whole transport position had been rendered difficult and almost impossible. After the outbreak of war shipping was disorganized to such an extent that arrangements had to be made even for shipping. We could not have said that we had ordered these articles from such a place and that we are hoping that they would come in. Action had to be taken to enlist the sympathy of the people who control shipping all over the world.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** All over the world?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** Yes; we had to enlist the sympathy of the Americans and the British, who control the shipping. All this had to be done. Everyone took a hand in the matter, and with the greatest difficulty we were able to secure transport facilities in order to make these foodstuffs available. So that with regard to the supplies, my Executive Committee did everything that could possibly have been done, and I am quite sure that anyone who reasonably considers the steps that were taken to ensure supplies will not attach any blame to the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce.

There is only one other aspect of the matter that I wish to deal with, that is the internal purchase scheme. That has been put on this definite footing, that the distribution of all perishables produced in this country will be the concern of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands—the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands has accepted that by arrangement between us—and that the question of all grains produced in this country, that is cereals which can be kept for some time

for the use of the public will be the concern of my Ministry; and steps will be taken by my Ministry to collect and to store up and make available for distribution the cereals produced in the country, mainly cereals like kurakkan and—

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** By whom was that arrangement sanctioned—by the Council or the Board of Ministers? I do not remember it.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I understood that we were responsible for the internal purchasing scheme. Well, we wanted to buy up all the Low-country paddy that is grown in this country—

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** If the Hon. Minister will give way for a moment, I want to be clear on this matter. Who made the arrangements about the responsibility of the Ministers, and so on?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** Well, we have had to do it. We know very well that in this country there is large production of manioc, for instance. There is production of all sorts of articles. And are you going to let all those commodities go to waste? Do you want us to come to Council and ask, "Who is going to collect it and distribute it?" There is the Marketing Department functioning, and the distribution of these foodstuffs is a function of the Marketing Department. Surely, you do not want us to come to this Council and say how all the vegetables produced in this country are going to be distributed. The vegetables produced in Anuradhapura might be distributed in Galle.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** But onions are rotting in Jaffna.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** That is why we want to do this work, in order to prevent any such rotting taking place. We have asked the authorities responsible to distribute all perishables that came in. We have undertaken the responsibility of looking after the cereals. Acting on that arrangement, a scheme has been drawn up and instructions issued.

Now, some hon. Members attached some blame to me for certain defects in the internal purchasing scheme. I have never tried to throw any blame which is attached to me on to somebody else,

but I want to say this, that the only difficulty which presented itself was that the original scheme which was put forward was not acceptable from the point of view of the amount to be paid for paddy purchased or the transport of paddy from certain areas, or the control of prices. I had that difficulty, because the original scheme was not accepted *in toto*. But that scheme was put forward in April. If I had had that scheme, I should have been purchasing from April up to now. But I had to put it aside.

Only recently this scheme was taken up when the Civil Defence Commissioner was appointed, and having examined the scheme, we consulted the Members of Council concerned with those areas and put it up to the Board of Ministers, and it has been accepted. So action is now being taken under that scheme to buy up all the possible paddy throughout the country. In addition, the necessary transport arrangements have been made, difficult as they are in this country.

***Mr. Yytilingam:** What is the price that Government is now paying for paddy?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** Buying is going on now on the old system, and this question will have to come up in a day or two by regulation, so I do not want to say anything about the future price. I think all hon. Members will to a large extent be satisfied that we are offering a price which is attractive to the producer and will keep him in the work of production and which will not at the same time be too much of a burden on the consumer. Both those points have had to be very carefully kept in mind when we considered the question of fixing the price. Anyway, that has been considered and a certain price fixed.

Now we have these factors: we have fixed a price which is not going to fluctuate or change; Government will become the sole purchaser of that paddy; and we are making the necessary arrangements for storage and distribution. So that on the question of the internal purchasing scheme also something definite has been done.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** Are you commandeering all the stocks or—

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** For the moment, we are making Government the sole buyer.

***Mr. Pounambalam:** Government has been the sole buyer always.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** Government has not been the sole buyer, because the other people have not been prohibited from buying. There is only voluntary sale to Government at present. If a person likes to sell to Government, he could sell to Government, but if he does not, he is not compelled to sell. Now we are saying that nobody is to buy except Government, and we certainly are taking steps to commandeer any stocks there may be of very large quantities, so that we can control all the paddy that is produced in this country in that way.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** That is, in self-supporting areas?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** No, Sir, throughout the whole country. There will be no self-supporting or non-self-supporting areas for that purpose; throughout the whole country that scheme will operate.

With regard to supplies, I have taken all this time to show the House that my Committee have taken this action. Of course, Sir, my Committee fails to a very large extent—for which I take most of the blame—in that by temperament neither my Committee nor I myself have been accustomed or are competent to undertake this very valuable task of window-dressing in this country. We have plodded and carried on and done our work to the best of our ability. We have never tried to make a show of it. That is certainly a fault, certainly a mistake, and I must freely confess it.

Sir, we have never gone after newspaper magnates, and we are paying the price for it to-day. But it is a price that we are prepared to pay, and I shall continue to pay it as long as I am in this House, indeed as long as I live. I shall not succumb to the blandishments, nor be terrorized by the tactics of big newspaper magnates who try to rule this country. I want to make that clear. The hon. Member for Matale (Mr. Aluwihare) was quite right when he urged that it was a case of pillorying. It is not a case of pillorying; it is a real racket.

***Mr. R. S. S. Gunawardana (Gampola):** That is the standard of journalism we have to-day.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** Which is the paper?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** Well, we have had to contend with these things.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** Which paper?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** Now I would like to refer very briefly to those other two points, the question of distribution and price control.

The question of distribution is very closely and intimately bound up with the question of transport, which is certainly one of the most difficult problems that we have in this country to-day. In spite of this transport difficulty, hon. Members will realize that to-day we are keeping supplied 16,000 authorized retail distributors and about 2,000 wholesale distributors in this country. That means that we have to distribute almost every day, throughout the whole country, nearly 14,000 bags of rice. It means that arrangements have to be made to have those bags measured, to have those bags ready for the wagons, to secure the wagons and to see that every one of these 16,000 supply stations are kept supplied with rice.

We began this rationing scheme on 2nd February last. I ask hon. Members whether it is any neglect on the part of my Committee or the officers working under it if from the 2nd of February last up to date, whatever other little defects there may be in the scheme, we have kept every single retail station going without a single day's absence of stock? Is that not something in which we can take pride? We undertook the task of the best and most equitable distribution of a limited supply of essential food. That meant that we had to see that every single person in this country who had to get rice, received it. I say that we arranged our affairs at the centre in such a way that rice was made available at every one of these distribution centres scattered all over the country, without a single place going short of rice on a single day. And I say, Sir, whatever the ration a person was entitled to get, whether it was sufficient or insufficient, we saw to

it that he received that ration, from the wilds of the North-Western Province to the most populous place you can think of.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** There are many places without rice.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** No, Sir. There are complaints about the quality of the rice, complaints about wholesale or retail dealers giving one kind of rice instead of another kind—these are difficulties which are inherent in any scheme and which we are trying to remove. But I will take my stand on this, that there has not been a single complaint that there has been no rice available.

When I say that, the House will appreciate our difficulty in regard to the matter. It is a matter of considerable concern and anxiety. To send the rice to all these stations, to send the paddy to all these stations, to send the flour to all these stations, to send the wheat to all these stations, we want a minimum number of wagons from the Railway. We have put it down as 80 wagons, 90 wagons, 100 wagons, and so on. But does the House know that we have never got more than 30 or 40 wagons? You can imagine the anxiety of those who have to supply the country with rice.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** Then how did you manage it?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** We managed it because our scheme was devised in such a way that we were able to stock every station with such a large quantity of rice, when we were able to get the transport, that they had more than a week's stock always. That itself shows that the officers dealing with this matter were not remiss or negligent in their duties. We considered the possibility of the transport system breaking down, and therefore every station, in places like Kurunegala and Ambepussa, for instance, was stocked with more than two or three weeks' supplies.

I will give an illustration, since some Members seem to think that these things are just happening and are not the result of careful forethought and consideration on the part of the officers concerned. There was the big fire in the Beira Lake which destroyed the railway line to some

extent. It was not functioning for sixteen or seventeen days, that is to say, not a single bag of rice could be sent down south. But were the people there left in the lurch, were they left to starve? No, Sir. We still supplied the south; we still sent the rice. We had to organize our transport.

The difficulties of these things are not fully appreciated. In spite of all these difficulties, we have distributed the rice. We have distributed as much as we can the sugar, the flour and the wheat required.

Of course, there are certain defects in regard to the distribution of these articles. I am not unaware of them. Nor do I claim any sort of perfection. In the nature of things, no scheme of control can be worked so as to give satisfaction to everybody. Such a scheme is not known in any part of the world. With the experience of four years during the last war, with all the ability available, in England too there are defects in the scheme, there are breakdowns, there are complaints, there is grousing—all that is going on.

But I wish to make it clear to hon. Members that I do not suggest that because there are difficulties experienced in other countries, because there are difficulties inherent in this scheme, we should tolerate any single deficiency or defect. I myself would like to see the scheme made perfect. If we have failed, and if there is someone who will come forward and undertake to do this work with complete satisfaction to everybody, there will be none more ready than I to support him and say, "Let it be done".

That is the attitude I take up with regard to this matter, because it is such a vital question. But I do want hon. Members to realize that it is so full of difficulties, literally, bristling with difficulties, that if the scheme has been carried on so far without a single breakdown, then it is something of which we need not be ashamed. There are difficulties which crop up in a hundred ways. Now we have to administer it through the agency of the normal machinery of Government. It is not altogether true, as one hon. Member said—I think it was the Member for Colombo North (Mr. G. R. de Silva)—that it is worked entirely through Government machinery, those 16,000 retail dealers are ordinary traders,

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and the wholesale dealers are also ordinary traders. We have used the Government machinery available to have them supplied with rice, and to keep account of such supplies.

Apart from the irksomeness of the scheme itself, apart from the inconveniences inherent in the scheme, there are sometimes complaints made against wrong acts of administration, lack of sympathy on the part of the hundred and one officials dealing with this matter. I should like to give a case in point. You say that Kachcheries, Government officials, are lacking in sympathy, but here you find what happens when this work is handed to local authorities. We allowed a certain Urban District Council to make arrangements for distribution of rice to people in their area, but now I am receiving petition after petition complaining against the arrangements made by that local authority. I do not say this to show that what they do is wrong. The Chairman and Members of that Urban Council allocated a certain boutique for certain people to get their rice from. Some consumer said that it was not convenient for him to make his purchase of rice from that boutique and sent in a petition. That discontentment was there, and it was carried to other people as well, and thereby it grew. You have to face the fact that there will be discontentment and dissatisfaction with regard to any restriction scheme.

The mover of this motion made reference, in the course of his remarks, particularly to one defect, one failing, on our part with regard to the rationing scheme, namely, the attachment of an individual consumer to a certain depot or retail distribution centre. As a matter of fact, he raised that point about the time the rationing scheme was introduced. I varied the original rationing scheme to this extent in view of several suggestions made by Members of this House, that I allowed every person to sell—[*Interruption.*] The difficulty that I anticipated did arise very strongly, which led practically to the breakdown of the whole rationing scheme.

The mover pointed out that what was not done in England was done here. He said that there was no rationing of bread in England during the last war and during

this war, but that we have undertaken the rationing of the equivalent of bread here. It is essential that such a scheme is undertaken in Ceylon in order to ensure to every single consumer that he will get his supply of rice.

I should like to give an example to show why such a step was taken. Suppose there were ten boutiques in Galle and there were 100 consumers in that area. We will also take it for granted that those 100 consumers were not attached to any boutiques for their supply of rice but were free to make their purchase from any place they liked. There was no guarantee that any one of those 100 consumers would get his supply of rice from any place. It is true that they have coupons to purchase their rice with, but not one of those ten boutique-keepers was bound to sell them rice. The boutique-keepers could have told those consumers, when they went to purchase their rice, that their stock of rice had been sold to others and that they were out of stock. We find that that happened in Galle. People from Matara and Akuressa had gone to different places and bought rice because they were free to buy it from any place they chose; and when some of the consumers went to the boutique to get their rations, they were told that the stock of rice had been exhausted. It may be that the retail dealer might have falsely said so. All those facts will very forcibly affect the question of credit.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** The whole basis of village economy was ruined.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** Under my scheme, the man is tied to the boutique which he chooses. That is the scheme. He chooses his boutique; he is given the right to exercise his choice. He chooses A, B or C as his dealer and he is tied to that dealer. As he makes the selection, the question of his credit is not so adversely affected. That is my opinion, based on experience in the past. The hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam) disagrees with it. It may be that, if the hon. Member had to do the work that I am now doing, he may do the opposite. Some other person dealing with this work might adopt a totally different procedure. I am only stating that my study and observation of the

problem has convinced me beyond all doubt—at first it was all theory, but now it is an accomplished fact—that there can be no other scheme for rationing the staple food of this country than the attaching of a person, according to his choice, to a particular dealer. That is my opinion, but of course there may be different opinions on that matter. I have dealt with the question of supply.

With regard to the question of distribution, I am perfectly clear in my own mind, and I want to make it clear to hon. Members, that the distribution system is not at all perfect. The distribution system has its defects and every possible step is being taken, in consultation with the Railway and road transport—

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** What about the increase in price?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I am coming to that.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** There is an abnormal increase.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** There has been an abnormal rise in price. The whole scheme was worked out in detail. We have to pay a certain price for the rice we purchase, and we add on to it the handling charges. We do not take a profit to Government. The price is a financial matter which must receive the sanction of the financial authorities and the Board of Ministers.

One of two courses is possible in regard to the price: we must either sell a measure of rice at 27 cents, so that Government would not bear a loss; or we must sell it at a lower figure than the cost, making Government bear the loss as a subsidy to the consumer. Those were the only alternatives. When the actual cost of the rice to us was known, we had to decide the figure at which a measure should be sold. The Board of Ministers decided to sell it at the price known to hon. Members, because the Board was of opinion that it could not undertake to bear a loss by selling the rice at a lower price. That is a question of principle, whether Government should bear a loss as a subsidy to consumers or whether the consumers should pay what the rice costs to Government.

If anybody else imported rice, the same considerations would have decided

the selling price; probably, if there was no Government control, the price to the consumer would have been higher, because Government does not charge anything more than the cost and the ordinary charges paid for distribution. The Government does not add to the selling price even the cost of administering the scheme. Government only charges the actual cost of purchase, the actual cost of distribution, the actual cost of transport and storage.

Hon. Members should bear in mind the fact that everything has gone up in price. Transport charges, in common with other charges, have risen. If we try to bring rice by rail from India, we would find that even the rail charges have risen. Even steamer charges have been increased. War risks insurance alone for cargo from Madras to Colombo is something like 17½ per cent. All those are additional charges that we have to meet. Not only that, even the price of rice has risen in India, owing to shortage and owing to keen competition among the Governments that buy rice from India. The price of rice to the consumer must, in those circumstances, naturally increase. And we were faced with the question whether Government should bear the loss or distribute the higher cost among the consumers.

That was the situation we were faced with. You cannot blame my Committee for the increase in price. It is a matter which had to be considered fully and in the light of the policy which was followed steps had to be taken.

Again, on the question of price control, I myself feel that there is room for improvement. There have been prosecutions everywhere. But the House should remember that there are people who will never give information about profiteering. There are people who will pay anything to get the article they want. In those circumstances, you cannot expect full public co-operation in bringing offenders to book. In order to secure public co-operation, I have issued instructions to every Government Agent, Assistant Government Agent and (Emergency) Assistant Government Agent to organize anti-profiteering societies, so that the public may be made to work with the Government officials in order to put down profiteering.

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We have issued instructions to the Local Assistance Committees to deal with this matter. [Interruption]. It took a very long time for me to get the first twenty-three Inspectors appointed, but what can twenty-three Inspectors do when they are scattered throughout the Island? What are seven loaves, Sir, when we have not the divine power to multiply them?

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** What about 1,000 Police Constables?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** The Inspector-General has been written to. Our officers are doing their very best to deal with the situation. That the number of officers is inadequate to cope with the task, everyone will agree. We want to undertake more propaganda in order to educate the public. We are seeking to appoint a larger number of people to deal with this matter, by having anti-profiteering societies, and so on. Our Department is taking steps to enlist the co-operation of the public; and we are enlisting the support of the Local Assistance Committees and also the assistance of local authorities. This is a matter in which, to a very large extent, Public Officers must be more alive.

I am sorry to say that I do not find the general authorities dealing with this matter alive to the actual situation. I know several cases where definite complaints made have been ignored. I have put up a certain case and pressed the matter with the Home Minister, where a certain man was caught red-handed and taken to the Police Station. The Police bailed out the man and subsequently no prosecution was launched against him, although the complainant was asked to come to Court on a certain day as witness. I am not condemning that Department wholesale. Some officers may be lax while others are not.

I am making every effort to deal with the situation that has arisen. I can go on in this strain, giving details of the work that has been done in the matter, but I do not want to delay the House by doing so. There are a number of defects which can be remedied. I have only so far attempted to intimate to hon. Members what the actual position is.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting is suspended till 4.30 P.M.

Sitting accordingly suspended until 4.30 p.m., and then resumed.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** When we adjourned for tea, I had just begun to deal with the motion itself after having explained, as I said, what should be the background, the issue before hon. Members in the consideration of the motion itself.

Before I develop that point, I would just like to refer to one matter to which I omitted to refer. It is not that it is mainly concerned with this motion as such. I want to remove any misapprehension that might be created as a result of the reference to it.

The hon. Member for Colombo Central (Dr. Kalcel) referred to some local company which had been given the right to import rice and to which I had agreed to pay a rather high commission. That requires a word of explanation. I want to make it very clear that at the time we wanted to obtain as much rice as possible from Madras, we welcomed anyone who offered to import rice from Madras, and one of the earliest people who put forward an application to have the right of importing were the party referred to by the hon. Member. That was before the Government of India began to license exporters; when we ourselves were directly concerned in importing. That application was very fully considered. They undertook to import rice and they asked for certain terms and conditions. The terms they asked for were very carefully considered by the Hon. Financial Secretary and myself, and after they had been very fully considered, the terms were agreed to with the full concurrence of the Hon. the Financial Secretary.

The impression that might have been created by the hon. Member's remarks is that I myself had agreed just to pay any rate that was claimed or a high rate of commission. I must say that there was nothing of the kind. It was only after the Hon. the Financial Secretary and I agreed on the terms and conditions that authority was given to the company in question to import rice. This company was a very large importer of rice before this scheme came into operation. Anyway, one thing I want to say is that that

company was the means of importing the largest quantity of rice imported from Madras as soon as we began to buy from Madras. However, the terms and conditions were considered satisfactory, and they were agreed to.

The motion itself places one certainly in a difficulty, because it is certainly not clear at all from the motion what exactly was intended by it. The motion was to the effect, no doubt, that there should be a separate Ministry of Food. But the mover himself was able to indicate the method by which that Ministry of Food was to be created as depending on the adoption of one or more alternative methods.

The amendment before the House moved by the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan) knocks out completely all the other methods, except the one referred to by the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam), because the limitation put on that motion by that amendment is that this Ministry of Food is to be created within the ambit of the present Constitution, which makes it perfectly clear then that there can be no new Minister with or without an Executive Committee nor any outside person created a special Minister. It restricts action to the possibilities within the framework of the Constitution only.

Within the Constitution, as we all know, it can be done by a redistribution of the functions allocated to Ministries under the Schedule to the Order in Council or perhaps by a reshuffling of Committees with the intention of providing a new Minister.

But even if the second method is to be adopted it means the amendment of the Constitution. So that will also have to be ruled out. That is to say, you cannot attain the object of reshuffling the Committees in such a way that instead of seven there will be eight Committees, and an eighth Minister therefore to be appointed, because within this Constitution there was no provision for an eighth Committee and therefore of an eighth Minister. Therefore, even that suggestion has to be ruled out, and we are definitely left with this one method, namely, the method of just redistributing the subjects which are now allocated to the different Ministries.

With regard to the amendment of the hon. Member for Balapitiya (Mr. Kula-

ratne), I wish to indicate at once that I certainly very strongly approve of it and I am prepared to accept that amendment so far as the amendment stands, for this reason, that I tried to indicate before we adjourned for to the action which my Ministry had taken with regard to the whole subject of food control in emergencies. I venture to submit that hon. Members who heard me will give some consideration to the facts which I have placed before the House. If that is done, and if they accept these facts and if the facts clearly disclose, as they do to my mind, that the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce had not been failing in its duty with regard to the essentials involved in food control, then, Sir, it is necessary that hon. Members of this House should delete those words the omission of which were suggested by the hon. Member for Balapitiya (Mr. Kularatne).

That becomes necessary, and I will bring it very specially to the notice of hon. Members that if they feel that apart from small difficulties, apart from perhaps some differences of opinion with regard to policy that might have been adopted—apart from inconveniences and difficulties inherent in a scheme of rationing or control—that generally on the broad, basic and fundamental matters the Committee had done what in the circumstances could be reasonably expected of them, then, I say, that the House should agree to delete those words from the motion of the hon. Member for Point Pedro (Mr. Ponnambalam).

Then we come to this very important question. I do not know whether the mover of the motion accepts the amendment of the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan). Suppose we say that the amendment of the hon. Member for Balapitiya (Mr. Kularatne) is accepted and certain words are deleted, and the amendment of the hon. Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan) is also accepted. Then the motion will read:

"That this House recommends the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food within the ambit of the Constitution."

That will be the motion on which hon. Members of this House will then have to give their decision.

I want hon. Members to consider fairly closely the implications of that motion. I want to say this, that as far

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as I am concerned if it is the view of hon. Members that the redistribution of subjects should take place with the object of placing only "Food" under one particular Ministry, I leave it entirely to the House to decide the matter. I do not wish in any way to say anything, because I am sure the House will be able to decide that matter in the largest and best interests of the country, apart from any other consideration.

But the important question that will have to be considered is whether, within the ambit of this Constitution, it will be possible, it will be practicable, to achieve this object. The consensus of opinion—I listened to almost every speech made in connexion with this motion—is that whichever Ministry takes over this subject, it must be that subject and that subject alone which must be entrusted to that Ministry. That was the general and almost the unanimous view of everyone who spoke on this motion. If that were so, and if that subject is retained within my Committee, it means that all other subjects that are now being dealt with by my Ministry must be handed over to one or other of the other Committees; otherwise, if this subject of food is to be handed over to another Minister, it means that all the other subjects which that Minister is now dealing with must be removed from him and handed over *in toto* to another Ministry or distributed among other Ministers.

That variation of the Constitution, although it is possible within the ambit of the Constitution, will amount to a variation or an attack upon the rights of individual Members who belong to those Committees, Members who have been elected by this Council, Members who have gone into those Committees by the exercise of a certain preference originally—

*Mr. Aluwihare: Accidentally!

*The Hon. Mr. Corea: Whether it was accidentally or by preference, they were asked to declare their preference; anyway, you would be challenging the right of those Members to deal with those subjects.

There are those and other very serious practical difficulties which will have to be solved. If those difficulties can be solved, if it is possible to redistribute

these subjects, then, Sir, personally I myself can have no objection. I would have felt that the most methodical, logical and proper method of dealing with this subject was not to pursue this method of distribution which must raise very serious practical difficulties. Not only the logical but the most advantageous method would have been for this House unhesitatingly on this occasion to declare that, in view of the present emergency, in view of the necessity for co-ordinated, concerted action on a sort of collective responsibility basis there should be a National Government formed in this country.

*Mr. Ponnambalam: But the Minister of Local Administration does not agree!

*The Hon. Mr. Corea: I am expressing my view. I say, Sir, that if we look at things from the point of view of the best interests of the country, if we look at things not narrowly but from a very broad point of view, not with a limited vision but with our future before us, then I say that, at this time when we are faced with a decision as to the best method of dealing with so intricate, complicated and important a problem as food, we should adopt this method which is not only going to solve the present difficulty but is going to meet undoubtedly the unanimous wishes of Members of this House and generally of the country, and that is that we should have a National Government at this time to take charge of affairs.

Therefore, if anyone were to ask me for my own views with regard to this question, I would say that the method that has been suggested may be accepted, but it will not give the satisfaction that everyone wishes to have by some kind of change of the present procedure. If we do want this business and other methods to be properly and more efficiently done, then it can be done only by a Constitutional method which can be adapted for the needs of the time, and that is by calling together a National Government, because under a National Government we can have any number—when I say "any number", I do not mean a ridiculous number, but any reasonable number—which is necessary according to the needs of the Government.

Now, you are talking of food, you are talking of removing other functions from

my Ministry or even the subject of food from my Ministry and putting it under somebody else. Have you ever paused to consider that you are tackling only the fringe of the subject? What about the problem of transport? The problem of transport is so great and so important that it is very necessary there should be someone to look after the whole question of transport. It is closely connected with the problem of food. Not only the problems of food and transport, but the problem of food control and distribution of food, and even the problem of food production are closely connected. There is the question of exports of commodities from our country, the question of transport affecting copra; the question of transport affecting rubber and tea; the question of transport affecting the movements of people; all these are connected. This is a very large question and it is essential that all these matters should be taken into consideration. Why is that not done? Because of the "narrowness" of this motion.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** Food is more important!

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I grant that, but you have to move food from place to place. It is useless having food if it is not available at the point where it is wanted. What I say is that the motion itself is so "narrow" that if it is given effect to, it will only result in a change-over with regard to the food question.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** That is most urgent!

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I admit that. But there is the other equally important and equally urgent problem, and those who have been faced with the difficulties of transport alone can realize to the fullest how important and how urgent that problem is. I am only drawing attention to the fact that you cannot achieve your object by reason of this motion.

***Mr. Dudley Senanayake:** How can a National Government do so?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** A National Government can do so, because there can be a Ministry of Transport set up.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** Does the Minister admit that he is overworked?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I shall come to that. I was referring to transport.

***Mr. Abeywickrama:** I want an answer to my question.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** If hon. Members will allow me to continue, I will deal with that point in due course.

***Mr. Dudley Senanayake:** I wish to ask a question, because it is important. I want to know how a National Government will solve the problem of transport?

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** I will explain that. A National Government can have a Minister of Transport.

***Mr. S. Samarakkody (Narammala):** Are you pressing for a National Government?

The Hon. Mr. Corea: I am only indicating what would be the best possible method of achieving the object in view.

***Mr. Aluwihare:** Suggest a plan.

***The Hon. Mr. Corea:** The mover himself has not suggested a plan. He has left it to the Board of Ministers and the Governor to discuss the matter and suggest a plan.

The motion as amended excludes the method of having a special Ministry or special Ministers. It excludes any alteration of the Constitution, because of the inherently limited scope of the motion now under consideration. As a result of that amendment, therefore, we have to put all other possible methods aside and restrict ourselves only to one. My own view is that it would be more advantageous to enlarge the scope of the motion and to have a Government which will be able to achieve this object by having a Minister for the subject, to deal with all the important and intricate problems by having Ministers in charge of those functions. Anyway that is a view which I wish to put before this House.

I would only like to add that as far as I am concerned—in this matter I am not speaking for my Committee—I have no objection to a reallocation of functions which will leave the Executive Committee entirely in charge of food alone, or

[The Hon. Mr. Corea.]

which will take away the subject of food from the Executive Committee and hand it over to some other Executive Committee. Some Members of my Executive Committee are entitled to object to this; they may have their own views, but I say that I have no objection for this reason.

I do not want it to be understood by this House that I oppose that idea or suggestion solely out of personal considerations. For instance, every Member of this House I have heard so far, excepting perhaps one Member, indicated that the subject of food should continue in the keeping of the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce. I believe only one Member suggested that it should be handed over to another Committee. But whether the suggestion is given effect to, or whether the subject is transferred to another Ministry, I do not want hon. Members to entertain the idea that on so important a matter I allowed my personal considerations or prestige or my own importance to stand in the way of the achievement of a purpose intended for the general benefit of this country.

I have been assured that this motion is not a vote of censure, that it is not worded so; I suppose the matter is made clear by the amendment of the hon. Member for Balapitiya—it will be if it is accepted—and the speeches of hon. Members. But I do want on this very momentous and important occasion to tell hon. Members that as far as it has been possible for me as a single individual to do the work that has been entrusted to me, I have not shirked my job or my responsibility. It has been a very serious responsibility. I admit that I have on my shoulders the work of a variety of Departments of a most complicated and important nature, and I have devoted towards it all my time and all my talent. If I have failed, it is not due to any lack of desire on my part to give of my best, but perhaps owing to my incapability. I have done my very best, and so has my Committee.

There are many matters that sometimes I have omitted to place before my Committee, but I have consulted the

Board of Ministers; acting in accordance with their decision that in matters of emergency the Board will act in a collective way, I have placed all matters before the Board and I, as an individual, have devoted my entire time to the duties entrusted to me. I will not say that the work is too much for me. I will never give up any work that is put on me. But if hon. Members of this House are convinced and say that it is much better to have one Ministry to do this one important job, then I am quite prepared to abide by that decision.

What I meant was that it is not in my nature to shirk any work that is entrusted to me. The work has been difficult, and it has meant many long hours day and night, and it has also meant continual anxiety. I wonder if hon. Members realize what annoyance and anxiety there is when one feels that the stock of rice is running out or that the chances of obtaining rice is remote. My Committee and I have undergone that anxiety and shouldered that responsibility; we have done what it has been possible for us to do, and if it is felt that one Ministry alone should do this work I shall not say nay.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy that I sponsored this resolution, because I can say with all seriousness that this House has not been called upon in recent times to decide upon and express its views upon a more momentous or a more urgent resolution than this, and if for that reason I gave this House that opportunity of expressing its views, I must, if you, Mr. Speaker, and the House will permit me, thank hon. Members for the support they have given to the main idea of the creation of a Food Ministry.

If this debate has revealed anything at all, it has revealed that this House, having regard to all that the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce has just now said, or not having regard to whatever he has said, but having regard to the awful and rugged crisis that confronts this country at the present moment, having regard to the tribulations and the very long suffering of the people in this country, this House, almost to a man, with one or two very notable exceptions, feels that at least in

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the first instance there should be one Ministry untrammelled by other considerations and unshackled by other duties which will be able to devote its entire time and energies to the solving of the food problem.

Whatever one may say or may not say, that is a problem that demands an immediate solution. No hon. Member, I venture respectfully to submit, elected by the suffrage of the people can go on any longer witnessing the spectacle of want, of deprivation, of prosecution by Headmen and other petty officials, by working on inadequate rations, and being called upon to pay inordinate prices demanded by a racketeering black-market. Mr. Speaker, I venture respectfully to think that none of us can venture to step out and face the people unless we do something either by pulling together or getting the Government to pull in a different direction to solve the problem.

That is all; and I will remark—and I hope I am right in remarking—that with the solitary exception of that pleading Constitutional purist, the hon. Burgher Nominated Member (Mr. Wille), no hon. Member of this House seems to be satisfied with the state of affairs as it is. The only person who put forward an unqualified plea for the maintenance of the *status quo* has been the hon. Burgher Nominated Member. Well all that I want to say is this:—I do not want to say anything harsh at a time like this, but I wish to know whether the hon. Member is really alive to the difficulties and the enormities of the situation; whether the hon. Member, who is, I believe, so fast ageing, can meet the people to-day, whether he has seen life in the raw and experienced people who have stood in queues from 8 o'clock in the morning till 2 o'clock in the afternoon with ration books and not getting their rice. If he has seen that spectacle, may I know whether he could with any degree of equanimity get up on the Floor of this House and say that this *status quo* should be maintained?

The only other person who, if I may say so, did not see the necessity for the creation of a Food Ministry, of a Ministry exclusively devoting its attention to the solution of this problem, was the hon. Member for Udugama (Mr. Abeywick-

rama). He himself, just a few weeks ago, sponsored a motion of censure against the Minister. I really did my utmost to follow the meanderings of the hon. Member in his submissions to the House, but what I was able to gather was this, that he sponsored a vote of censure which most of us had voted against; therefore, he is no longer prepared to consider any motion, which might not be a vote of censure but which I should have thought he would have supported, and which he sought to interpret as a vote of censure. I do not think I need take much time in dealing with the hon. Member because, I believe the theme of his song was, "I cannot understand; I cannot understand; I cannot understand". Might I say that I can only address arguments and that I cannot supply understanding?

With regard to the others, I will only say this that there is no one Member then of those outside the well of the House, that little charmed cotidian circle, who is prepared to say that to-day the question of food is being tackled and tackled satisfactorily.

One knows the great difficulty in sponsoring a motion of censure. We saw it the last time. One can always find difficulty and in the last resort one knows the rather sloppy sentimentality of the majority of Members of this House when it is a direct vote of censure against a particular Minister. But with what are we in this crisis concerned? It has been said on all hands that the Minister is being overworked; that that Ministry, we know for a fact, has grown beyond all recognition, the very humble and small Ministry of 1933, when I first entered that Ministry, which only dealt with labour questions and the Registrar-General's Department, has to-day, I believe, grown beyond any other Ministry. So that there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for the difficulty in handling the situation by this Ministry, namely, the accretion of work that has gone on all these years, added on to what has happened in the last 7 or 8 months.

Now, all that we say is this: it is a remarkable thing that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings cometh truth. The rough diamond from Nuwara Eliya voiced the sentiments very correctly. He said; "You go on passing motions; you

[Mr. Ponnambalam.]
go on making speeches; but what happens? As far as the people are concerned, they are hopelessly and absolutely dissatisfied with what happens". I say with a deep sense of responsibility that no truer words were spoken on this question. You can talk and talk; you can dole out palliatives; you can make fine speeches, but you should go out, step into the country and see whether those arguments or any kind of condonation or any attempt at palliation receives sympathy from the people at large.

Might I say this also, that I have been simply pained by the attitude taken up by the Minister of Agriculture and Lands with regard to the question why this motion was sponsored, as he called, in haste on Thursday last and debated on Friday last. I am surprised that he should always endeavour to discover a porcupine hiding behind every bush. Might I say that a person of his position could be more generous to those of us who cannot command the influence that he does command? He might have given us credit for this: this idea of a Food Ministry was first adumbrated by me more than two months ago in an interview to the *Times of Ceylon*. That, I think, was published, and most hon. Members knew of it.

Subsequently, I must say that I was slightly remiss in perhaps not bringing forward this motion immediately afterwards. But in point of fact I felt that it was a matter in which public opinion should be created, that hon. Members in this House and people outside it should have an opportunity of considering the matter. And when three or four weeks ago the Member for Udugama (Mr. Abeywickrama) sponsored his motion of censure, you will remember that I moved an amendment to the effect that a Food Ministry be created, but it was ruled out of order.

Then after the announcement on Thursday morning by the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce that the Minister of Home Affairs was to proceed to India in connexion with this very question—I do not mind mentioning it, Mr. Speaker—there was very definitely a volume of opinion which wanted to take action by means of a motion against the Minister of Home Affairs proceeding to India. Well, a number of us met to-

gether, and we thought that instead of going along and sponsoring a motion directed against an individual, the best thing that could possibly be done was to go on further with this motion which had already been discussed by Members, the vast majority of whom were beginning to be convinced that a Minister of Food was an essential *sine quo non* for the solution of this problem.

That is why I came to sponsor this motion rather in a hurry which is only show by the shortness of notice on paper. I hope the Minister of Agriculture and Lands will be satisfied with that explanation. I hope, therefore, I have laid the bogey that this motion is inspired, as the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands tried to make out, by the appointment of the Civil Defence Commissioner to that rather nebulous position of Director of Food Supplies, which designation he actively displays.

Well, there arises a very interesting point. The whole House, as I have already pointed out, almost to a man, feels that a Minister of Food should be brought into existence, that somehow or other the present Minister should not be allowed to go on with these functions in respect of food in addition to his other functions. I put this straight question to the Board of Ministers: have they been satisfied with the direction, with the policy of this Ministry in respect of food all these months? Mr. Speaker, I venture the opinion without fear of contradiction that they have not, that in spite of the defeat of the motion of censure brought forward by the Member for Udugama (Mr. Abeywickrama) the Board of Ministers in point of fact have subscribed to the view that everything was not all right in the State of Denmark when they actively acquiesced, if they did not in point of fact demand it, in the appointment of a person to a post which has no precedent in the Constitutional history of this country for the last twelve years. I say so because the appointment of the Civil Defence Commissioner to this post and to be sandwiched in between three Heads of Departments and the Ministry has no analogy whatsoever in the Constitutional history of this country, and if it bears any analogy to anything at all it is remotely to the position of an Under Secretary of State. Now, is it not extraordinary that Minis-

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ters who have acquiesced in the adoption of this device should come here and talk of Constitutional difficulties?

I put to them the next question; is it or is it not a fact that Ministers have come to a realization of the difficulties to such an extent that they contemplated the creation of an Officer of State to deal with food?

***The Hon. Mr. G. E. de Silva:** Nothing of the kind.

***Mr. Ponnambalam:** Were not some of the Ministers at any rate agreed on that? I know—and I say it without fear of contradiction—that some of the Ministers were agreed upon the appointment of an Officer of State to be in charge of food exclusively.

Mr. Speaker, having contemplated such a possibility, the fact that these extreme nationalist friends alone should come here and speak with extreme unctuousness about Constitutional difficulties and changes that are contemplated in this motion leaves me very cynical and cold. I am reminded of that Latin tag, and I say it with particular reference to my Hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture and Lands: *Omnia mutantur nos et mutamur in illis*. Somebody wants a translation of it, and I would only say this: Don Stephen, your dashing crackers are turning out to be such damp quibs because you have changed. More literally, it is: All things are subject to change, and we change with them.

I should have thought that the gargantuan Member for Galle (Mr. H. W. Amarasuriya) should really have considered this question instead of talking pontifically about the Constitution. I can only explain it in this way, that as far as the hon. Member is concerned, food and his constitution are synonymous.

What then are we left with in the matter of opposition to this motion? We are left with the speech of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands and the speech of that diminutive pontiff, the Minister of Local Administration. Those are the only two speeches in opposition to this motion that we have to consider. Now what does the Minister of Agriculture and Lands say? We do not want

him in the matter of the word "creation". That, I think, has been sufficiently analysed by my Hon. Friend the Minister of Local Administration. But to go on, he says, "The present position,"—to put it in a nutshell—"is unsatisfactory; the system of Government is defective and unsatisfactory; a change is absolutely required". But what change does he contemplate? He says that a change within the ambit of the Constitution will go to some extent, but not quite satisfactorily, to solve the difficulties of the situation. By implication one who is virtually the Leader has admitted that the situation is so difficult as to require a change.

Well, in those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, to many hon. Members, who profess to have been baffled by the terms of my motion, I say that all that I intended to elicit—and I am glad that I have succeeded in eliciting it—was the fact that as far as the back-benchers and the opposition are concerned, they demand the creation of a Ministry of Food, and no more. Therefore it did pain me, and it did somewhat surprise me, to find that while the situation was deteriorating right round us in the country, they should have indulged in a dialectic display, that they should have indulged in quibbles with regard to the Constitution and Constitutional changes.

All that I wanted was a Ministry of Food, no more and no less than what the Members of the Opposition in England demanded of the Chamberlain Government shortly before the war. They wanted a Ministry of Supply, and they did not enter into the *intricacies* of Constitution-making and Cabinet Government. They merely said, "The situation is so urgent that a Ministry of Supply should be formed."

If this House demands in unequivocal terms the creation of a Ministry of Food, the question of ways and means of establishing that Ministry is another matter; it is a much less important matter. The end is what we are after; the end is the Ministry of Food, and the means is only a matter of implementing the demand of the House.

In speaking on this motion I did say that it could be implemented in one of several ways, namely, by a reshuffling of the functions of the various Executive

[Mr. Ponnambalam.] Committees, leaving the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce—I contemplated that possibility—in sole charge of a Ministry of Food. Why? The purpose of my motion is to show—the gravamen of my case is that the question of food supplies is now a one-man's job. I put that categorically to hon. Members: are they or are they not prepared to subscribe to the view that it is exclusively a one-man's job, that it is a job which demands the undivided attention of one Ministry? That is all. We should then be in a position to attach responsibility to a single Ministry.

I do not mind telling the House that if, for instance, the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce is relieved of all his other functions and is put in charge of food and fails to deliver the goods, then the time would certainly be opportune, if he did not himself resign or retire, for this House to move a vote of no-confidence against him. Then the Council would be compelled to accept that motion.

If it is not possible to hand over the functions to the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce, then any other Member of the Board of Ministers might be given the job, if it is the concensus of opinion in this House that the number of Ministries should be confined to seven. I, on the other hand, went further and said that the work of the Ministers is increasing and has increased to such an extent during the last two or three months that they cannot cope with it. Then clearly it is time to consider the question of electing an extra Minister. It does not matter how you arrive at the solution of the problem; if you are convinced that that is what is wanted, if you feel that you cannot get on with the work otherwise, if you cannot do what the people and the country demand without the appointment of an eighth Minister, well, then, produce him.

I wish to assure the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Lands that in making this suggestion I was not trying to drive in the thin end of the wedge; that it was no subtle, circumspect, action on my part with a long-distance view in mind. If it were otherwise, there would not have been that reaction to my motion that we saw when the hon. the Nominated Member. (Mr. Jayah), and the hon. Member

for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan) spoke. The hon. Nominated Member definitely said that my suggestion amounted to a piece-meal amendment of the Constitution, and the hon. member for Kankasanturai was compelled to move his amendment because of the red herrings that were drawn across the trail—all this talk about Constitutional difficulties—while the demand, this all-important and all-consuming demand for a Ministry of Food, was allowed to recede into the background. We saw how these little Constitutional red herrings were drawn across the trail.

Naturally, then, we are restricted in our methods of solving this problem. I do not mind telling the House that I personally have the gravest doubts, most serious doubts, that the problem could be solved in such a restricted fashion. But in view of the very great concensus of opinion that has emanated from this House, I am compelled to accept the amendment of the hon. member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan), namely, that we should have a Ministry of Food, exclusively concerned with the question of food, within the ambit of the present Constitution. I am accepting that amendment, but, as I said, that would not be the final solution of the problem.

The Hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Lands has told us that not only in respect of food but also in respect of the system of Government generally that now obtains, and generally with regard to the war effort, they were finding it difficult to carry on. I think he said, "This system of Government is wholly unsuited; very much so now because of the effort necessary because of the war!" He went on to say that the Ministers feel that a mere re-distribution of functions would not be sufficient, and that a change into a Cabinet system was necessary. Then the Minister of Agriculture and Lands went on to say—apparently I am his favourite *bete noir*, his pet aversion—that if there was one person who was opposed to the necessary amendments for the introduction of the Cabinet System of Government, it was the Member for Point Pedro.

I should have expected the Minister of Agriculture and Lands to have been surer of his facts. Among those who voted for the Committee System during the debate on Constitutional reforms, I

was one of those who definitely said, without qualification, that I was convinced that the Committee System of Government, involving as it did, in the words of Professor Keith, "anonymous initiative and fugacious responsibility", was wholly unsuited as a strong form of Central Government, but that, in so far as the designers of our Constitution had made the Committee System the very corner-stone of the Constitution, the very basis of the Constitution, and had further contemplated that the Committee System would alone be a safeguard for the minority communities in this country, I was not prepared to vote for the removal of the Committee System from within the Constitution, as a part of the Constitution, till the whole Constitutional issue was decided. I made that position amply and abundantly clear, I hope, and for that reason, and in view of the stand the minorities had taken, I voted against the scrapping of the Committee System.

If the Ministers felt that at a time like the present a change was necessary, I should have thought that they would have had both the courage and the candour to come to this House, or at an informal meeting of Members, and say, "We want such-and-such a change in order to carry on the Government, in order to fulfil the functions that we are now called upon to discharge, and without that change we are finding it difficult, well nigh impossible".

Why, Mr. Speaker, must we, living in this country and pre-ordained to continue to live in this country, indulge in this game of "circumspection" and suspicion and distrust? Why could not the Ministers have come and told the House of their difficulties, particularly in view of the fact that we of the minority communities had called a truce to political controversy and said that for the duration of the war we were not raking up our demands? In these circumstances, was it too much to have expected the Ministers to have come along and made their demands?

The Minister of Agriculture and Lands has a way of putting things very frankly. Why did he not come and tell us of their difficulties? He has not hesitated to do so in the past. Has he not come and told us his grievances against the Officers of State and the Public Services Commis-

sion, and has he not invited his friends in this House and others to follow him into the wilderness when, in his own words, he found that he could not deliver the goods? When the Financial Secretary envisaged the possibility of financial bankruptcy in this country, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands said, "Well, financial bankruptcy will probably result, because we are shackled, we are strangled. Come along; let us leave this House and go away." Why could not the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, at this time of great stress and urgency, come and make an appeal to us?

In so far as the matter has been broached, I would like to say this, and I say it with a full sense of responsibility. The representatives of the minority communities will certainly not be found to have been a spoke in the wheel of progress of this country; they will not be found to have acted as a brake on the war effort; they will not be found to have done anything that did not enable Ceylon to pull its weight as a unit of the British Commonwealth of nations. I want to say this—with the qualification that it is for the duration of the war and without prejudice to the demands that we have made—we can yet meet them in Philippi—without prejudice to our normal peacetime Constitutional demands, without reopening the Constitutional question now, I say that if a National Government is formed, representative of all the important elements in this country, with Cabinet responsibility for the duration of the war, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands and those of his way of thinking can rest assured that the minorities will not stand in the way.

I will now, Mr. Speaker, adjure the House, having regard to what I have stated, to vote either for the amendment of the Member for Kankasanturai (Mr. Natesan) or for my motion, because I have accepted his amendment. If the amendment of the hon. Member for Kankasanturai is accepted, it can be incorporated in my motion and the amendment motion can be put to the House.

I would appeal to the hon. Member for Balapitiya (Mr. Kularatne) to withdraw his amendment to this motion—my motion is not one of censure on the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce—it will then be a direct vote on the question of a Food Ministry.

[Mr. Ponnambalam.]

The question of re-orientation of policy is necessary, because, in the one hour's statement of the Hon. Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, we found not one statement of policy. What was given to us was a whole long-drawn-out statement of administration but not an indication of policy. Therefore I appeal to the House that those words with regard to re-orientation of policy be accepted.

I will, even at this late hour, beseech the House to accept this motion unanimously.

Mr. Speaker: I will put the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Balapitiya, that is, that the words, "is of opinion that" and the words after the word "Food" in the second line to the end of the motion, be deleted. I will put the question in the usual form.

Question put, "That the words proposed to be deleted stand part of the motion".

The Council divided—Ayes, 17; Noes, 26.

AYES.

Abeygunasekera, Mr. E. W.
De Fonseka, Mr. Susanta
De Silva, Mr. G. R.
Dharmaratnam, Mr. S.
Freeman, Mr. H. R.
Griffith, Mr. F. H.
Gunawardana, Mr. R. S. S.
Hangantilleke, Mr. J. H.
Jayah, Mr. T. B.

Kaleel, Dr. M. C. M.
Natesan, Mr. S.
Parfitt, Mr. H. F.
Ponnambalam, Mr. G. G.
Rajapaksa, Mr. D. M.
Samarakkody, Mr. S.
Siriwardana, Mr. H. de Z.
Vytilingam, Mr. S.

NOES.

Kannangara, The Hon.	Jayasuriya, Mr. A. P.
Mr. C. W. W.	Kularatne, Mr. P. de S.
Senanayake, The Hon. Mr.	Kuruppu, Mr. J.
D. S.	Mahadeva, Mr. A.
Corca, The Hon. Mr.	Newnham, Mr. H. E.,
G. C. S.	C.M.G., Y.D.
Kotalawala, The Hon.	Pereira, Diwan Bahadur
Colonel J. L.	I. X.
De Silva, The Hon. Mr.	Ratwatte, Mr. H. L.
G. E.	Razik, Mr. A. R. A.
Abeywickrama, Mr. Simon	Senanayake, Mr. Dudley
Aluwihare, Mr. B. H.	Sri Pathmanathan, Mr. R.
Amarasuriya, Mr. H. W.	Tambimuttu, Mr. E. R.
Batuwantudawe, Mr. U.	Wanigasekera, Mr. D.
De Zoysa, Dr. A. P.	Whitby, Mr. G. R.
Hewavitarne, Mr. Rajah	Wijie, Mr. G. A. H.

Mr. Speaker: The next question is that the words "within the ambit of this Constitution" be added at the end of the motion.

Question put accordingly, and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I will now put the motion as amended.

Question, "That this Council recommends the immediate creation of a Ministry of Food within the ambit of this Constitution", put, and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT.

The Hon. Mr. Senanayake: I move that Council do now adjourn until 10 A.M. to-morrow.

Question put, and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at 5.40 P.M. until 10 A.M. on Thursday, August 13, 1942.