

statistics is the end aimed at by the Bill the Department of Labour is not necessary for that purpose. It appears, however, that the compilation of statistics is not the main purpose. The idea is to set up a Department of Labour which will have very wide powers, and to some of these we object as being very dictatorial and likely to cause conflict. Mr. Thompson has referred to some of these in section 6 and in the subsections to section 7. Then, section 9 is a wonderfully sweeping section. It provides that any officer appointed by the Government "shall have all the powers and authorities conferred by 'The Commissioners' Powers Act, 1867,' on a commission issued or appointed by the Governor in Council." That Act can be easily referred to, and it will be found that it is there provided that such a commission shall only be granted under exceptional circumstances, and certainly not for the purposes provided for in this Bill. Clause 10 has already been referred to in regard to the penalty for neglecting to furnish information; and so has clause 11, with regard to the jurisdiction of the Stipendiary Magistrate: therefore I shall not further allude to them. Speaking generally about the Bill, what strikes me personally is this: that if it were only giving effect to what appears at a glance to be its purport we should not take much objection to it. I take it that it follows the lines on which the legislation of the United States is based by which the State Governments there collect labour statistics. But there is a difference in the proposals brought down by the Labour Department here. In the United States the Government has avoided in any way a defence of a part of the community at the expense of others. It has an impersonal bureau, and its statistics are entirely impartial, and merely for general information. It may be a very desirable and necessary thing to have these statistics, and the gathering together of this information would not be seriously objected to if it were placed in the hands of such a Department as exists in the United States; but I think I am not saying too much when I say that if this authority is placed in the hands of the Labour Department there will be very considerable resentment throughout the employers in the colony, because it must be borne in mind that there is already a feeling of distrust in the Department. I do not for one moment desire to reflect on the gentleman who is at the head of that Department—I believe he is doing his duty according to his lights—but there is no disguising the fact that the Labour Department is the special guardian of the labourer, and has no regard in its work for the general public or the employer. You can readily see that if such powers are granted to the Labour Department, occupying this position in the eyes of the public and of the employers, there is sure to be a great amount of resentment, and considerable friction, which we are as anxious to avoid as this Committee is. I believe that since the labour legislation came into effect the employers have done their best to meet the requirements of the law in all respects, and abide loyally by the law decisions. It does not seem prudent that anything should be done which would cause friction between one section of the community and another, and I am satisfied that if this Bill becomes law a great amount of harm will be done. In fact, if this measure comes into force, in conjunction with the Labour Bills recently passed, everything will be in the hands of the Labour Department, and they can make the position of the employers exceedingly unpleasant and probably untenable. That is not a desirable state of things, and I do not believe this Committee desires it. I think the Committee wishes that all parties to the commonwealth should have a share in the administration of the law, and it will desire that there should be no friction between sections of the community. I have no more to say, but if the Committee desires any further information with regard to the clauses of the Bill we are here to give it.

Mr. DAVID GOLDIE made a statement. (No. 15.)

*Mr. Goldie*: I do not think I have anything further to say. I believe you want to get everything you can for the worker, but under these laws you will find it very hard to get them work at all. I am a large employer of labour, and I am in this difficulty: that I have to a great extent to employ experts, and I cannot take on those who come in from the other colonies—and they are very numerous—who are not experts and put them beside those who have been working for me for many years. They are men who understand their business, and yet these men who come in here and know nothing about it are to receive the same remuneration. I have been compelled over and over again during the last twelve months to refuse to give persons employment on that account only. With regard to the Bill itself, we most strongly object to the insertion of the words "cost of production" in the information to be supplied by employers, because some of us can produce at a lower price than others, and we have no right to be asked to give up to the Government or to any of its officers our means of producing. Then, again, with regard to clause 7, in the subsection which refers to the employment of workers, we most strongly object to the insertion of these words "and such other particulars as may be deemed necessary in order to ascertain the relations between such employer and worker." We think that is altogether too inquisitorial. The words "deemed necessary" cover an enormous amount of ground, and half our time would be taken up in obtaining this information. Again, in relation to subsection (c), it commences with the words "obtain from all persons." We may have persons in our employ whom we think it right to discharge, and yet there is power given to obtain from such persons "such further and general information, either general or particular, as the Minister deems necessary relating to combinations of capital or labour and their effect on production and prices of commodities." That seems to us to be altogether too inquisitorial, and it is unfair to ourselves that the Government or its officers may be able to pick up any person who may be prepared to come forward and give information on these matters. Clause 9 provides that "For the purpose of obtaining any information to which he is entitled under this Act, the Minister, or any officer so appointed or authorised as aforesaid, shall have all the powers and authorities conferred by 'The Commissioners' Powers Act, 1867,' on a Commission issued or appointed by the Governor in Council." So that any inferior officer of the Government may take hold of us, summon witnesses, and extract information which it may be most injurious to our business to disclose.