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[HANSARD 1803–2005](#) → [1910s](#) → [1918](#) → [August 1918](#) → [5 August 1918](#) → [Commons Sitting](#) → [CONSOLIDATED FUND \(No. 3\) BILL](#)

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION.



HC Deb 05 August 1918 vol 109 cc925-1019

Hansard

Order for Second Reading read.

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

Mr. LEIF JONES On the Second Reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill, now moved, the Government have at last provided us with an opportunity, long desired, to put to them certain questions about the Ministry of Information. At present we know little about it, as it is not the creation of Parliament. It exists, and was announced to us through the Press, though up to the present we have been kept in the dark as to its constitution, its purposes, its methods, and its relation to other Departments of the State. I hope that to-day light may be thrown on all these matters. I confess that before bringing this question forward I felt some anxiety about dealing with the matter of propaganda in enemy countries, lest I might be treading on delicate ground, and possibly raising questions we had better not discuss during the War. But all anxiety of that kind is allayed by the action of the Ministry themselves, because we have seen the Lords and Commoners, who compose the Ministry, competing with one another, and advertising themselves and others, and the offices they hold in their public appointments. I therefore can debate this with much greater freedom than I should have felt if dealing with a more reticent body of public servants. It is, perhaps, desirable that the House should go back a little to examine how this Ministry has come into being. Before the War there was no Government propaganda from public funds in this country, and there was no Press Bureau for the selection and manufacture of news and views for consumption by the multitude. We had a Press absolutely free from Government interference, and our news was the fullest and our newspapers were the most informing and influential in the whole world. The Government made no use of the Press, though of course, then, as now, individual Ministers were more or less skilled in the art of advertising, but as a Government no use was made of the Press. But even before the War a Committee had been set up, consisting of representatives of the War Office and the Admiralty, with representatives of the Press, to consider what should be done with regard to the control of the Press in the event of war breaking out, and that Committee, as I am informed, decided that the only action to be taken should be of the regulative and restrictive character which is obviously necessary when war is going on.

When the War broke out the Government felt it desirable, in view of enemy misstatements about our objects and our purposes in entering the War, that an authoritative statement should be made to the world of the purposes of the Government and the aims which this country had in entering the War, and of the great principles for which we held ourselves to be fighting in the War. I think, in the circumstances, that the Government were absolutely justified in taking that course. I think it was well that they should endeavour to put before the world a full and authoritative statement, drawn from official documents, of the policy which had been pursued by the Government and of the circumstances which led to our entrance into the War. I could wish that even then the Government had done it quite openly, and that instead of letting the pamphlets and leaflets appear as if they came from private individuals or committees, they had boldly put them forward as Government publications containing the vindication of this country's part in entering the War. However, that course was not taken. A small Department was set up at Wellington House in the office of the Insurance Commissioners under Mr. Masterman, whose duty it was to bring out these leaflets and pamphlets, and I am bound to say, as Mr. Masterman has been a great deal criticised in past years, that the early work done by that small in numbers and comparatively obscure body of men, working in private, was exceedingly good, and that they brought out a very large number of useful publications, such as Mr. Headlam's "Twelve Days," Lord Bryce's Committee's Report on Belgium, and various other authoritative statements in regard to the position of the

Government and of the country in the War, and to the action of the enemy. As I say, I think it would have been better had it all been done quite openly, in order that we might have fought the misstatements that were made about us in neutral countries, in enemy countries, and, indeed, in our own country, by an authoritative exposition of the policies and of the aims of this country, but that was not done. They were brought out privately by what was the very beginning of the information system in this country. Soon afterwards, alongside of Mr. Masterman's Department, grew up another Committee—partly, I think, under the Home Office, sometimes under the Foreign Office, more generally floating somewhere between the two, and owned by neither—a Committee which attended to films and to wireless news. Mr. Mair, I understand, was in charge of that Committee. That was carried on with increasing vigour and a comparative recklessness in regard to expenditure, because, apparently there was nobody to check the output, and everyone engaged in this work was left practically free to follow his own devices. They did the best they could, with little guidance from the Treasury, and, as a result, considerable waste and extravagance occurred in the work of the office.

When the present Government came into office at the end of December, 1916, one of the measures they took in hand was the first reorganisation of the Department of Information—indeed, I did wrong to call it the Department of Information at that time, because it was the present Government, in January, 1917, which really set up and organised a definite Department of Information. They gathered together the various bodies and organisations which had grown up to do this work and divided them under four different heads. Colonel Buchan was placed at the head of the whole Department, and he had working under him four different bodies in four different parts of London. There was, first of all, Mr. Masterman's Department, carried on at Wellington House. That continued to put forth books and pamphlets, with great vigour, which were circulated throughout the world. Mr. Mair continued his work on cinemas, and, I think, wireless, but it is very easy to go wrong in knowing exactly who had charge of any particular Department at any particular moment. Mr. Mair, I think, working from the Lord Chancellor's office in the House of Lords, controlled the cinemas and the wireless, and I believe that Mr. Mair's Department was also in charge of the entertainment of our foreign visitors. It is Mr. Mair who, I understand, is responsible, for instance, for the entertainment referred to in paragraph 13 of the Sixth Report of the National Expenditure Committee, where an incident is reported of a visit of twelve gentlemen to Dublin, when £31 of public money was spent in two days in drink and £5 in cigars. The House will recognise that I am not a great authority on how much should be spent in entertaining twelve gentlemen to wine and cigars.

Commander BELLAIRS Does it follow that the drinks were spent on themselves?

Mr. JONES I understand the drinks were consumed by the gentlemen present at the entertainment.

Colonel WEDGWOOD Were there twelve or more?

Mr. JONES I do not know. I have heard it criticised by wine drinkers as being an excessive amount, but, as I say, I am no authority on these matters, and all I would say is that I think entertainment at the public expense is a rather dangerous power for a Department to exercise, and that it should be done with very great discretion. That was Mr. Mair's Department. There was a third Department, and that, I think, is the most important of all, namely, the Political Intelligence Department. That had its headquarters at 82, Victoria Street. The work of that Department was really to gather contemporary evidence from newspapers in foreign countries, to collate them, and to put them together as documents for the perusal of the Departments and the Government, and also, I think, of the Press. That was most important work, and I think it has been very well done, and I am glad to know that at the present time that Department of Political Intelligence is no longer under the Ministry of Information, but has been transferred to the Foreign Office. I hope it will remain there, for it is a great deal better there than in the hands of the Ministry of Information, because this work is not propaganda work at all.

4.0 P.M.

It ought to be done with absolute impartiality, and I think it is so done. Daily extracts are published from all foreign newspapers, which are exceedingly interesting to read, and which fulfil a most useful purpose. That is material history. It is most important it should be done day by day, contemporaneously with its appearance in the papers abroad, but that is wholly distinct from the News Department of the Ministry of Information—the Fourth Department. If political intelligence is the History Department of the Ministry of Information, the News Department is the imaginative department, the fiction department, the body which dresses up the facts for presentment to the public, a most important function, and one leaving scope for individual imagination and individual propaganda, which again may be very dangerous if not exercised with the greatest possible care. Over these four Departments we had Colonel Buchan, who was supposed to have direct access to the War Cabinet; he was responsible only to the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet. But the War Cabinet is a body with many things to do, and it did not find very much time to devote to Colonel Buchan and the Information Department. Consequently after a short period the Department was in 1917 placed under the control and supervision of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Trinity College, Dublin (Sir Edward Carson). His was a brief and inglorious reign. The right hon. Gentleman seems to have taken the duties very lightly, and I cannot find any mark anywhere of his progress in the Department. He came and he went, and I know of nothing that occurred during that period. All this time there seems to have been little or no financial control exercised over the expenditure of the four Departments. Colonel Buchan was nominally the accounting officer. The Treasury had one interview with him to suggest some form of accounts which might be kept by the Department, but they took no steps to find out whether those accounts were kept, and in this matter I desire to say most emphatically more blame rests on the Treasury for any waste in connection with the Department than on the men who had the actual spending of the money. Remember this was a new Department. The men were new to public service, they were not Civil servants, they did not know Civil Service ways and methods in connection with the spending of money, and it does seem most extraordinary that with the exception of one interview with Colonel Buchan the Treasury should have let the whole thing slide until the accounts got into inextricable confusion and waste had gone on in a hundred different directions. No doubt it was the duty of the accounting officer of the Department to bring to the notice of the Treasury any failure to keep accounts or any slackening in the manner of accounting. But then it must be remembered that in this case the accounting officer was not a man accustomed to accounting work and therefore the Department has reason to complain that the Treasury did not give it that helping hand in the management of its finances which might have been expected. But I am not going to say very much about the finances of the Department. My right hon. Friend the Member for the City of London (Sir F. Banbury) has been chairman of the Sub-committee of the Committee on National Expenditure which has investigated the expenditure of this Department, and I feel sure he will have something to say about it. Still, I hope that out of this Debate will come one result, that in regard to all Departments where men not used to public service have the handling of public money there will be more constant touch with the Treasury than has been the case in the past.

Let us turn for a moment to the result of the expenditure. Admittedly the propaganda in foreign countries has not been of any very great value, judged by its results. I think that I may say it was a dead failure in Russia. A vast number of books and pamphlets were sent out there, but those who sent them appear to have been forgetful of the fact that 80 per cent. of the Russian people do not read. What was needed, we are told, was that men who knew the Russian language and were acquainted with the country should go out, but such men are very difficult to find. There are not many English people who know Russia and are capable of penetrating into the minds of the Russian people. It is a difficult thing to do. Vast sums of money were spent on doing things which in their very nature could not reach the people in foreign countries whom it was desired to reach. Another mistake was that after the Revolution we continued to send cables to Russia from newspapers in this country which were well known to sympathise with the old regime, and I cannot imagine anything more foolish on the part of this country than to be sending after the Revolution messages and dispatches from sources which were notoriously unfriendly to the Revolution in Russia. Along with the Department of Information there was an advisory committee of editors, and it would take a far longer time than I have at my disposal to disentangle; the relationship between the committee of editors and the Department over which Colonel Buchan presided. A great deal of money was spent in Italy, not wisely. A large sum was spent in South America with very

little result. America was perhaps best done, and that was due to the fact that Sir Gilbert Parker, a former member of this House, was responsible for a great deal of correspondence to America long before America intervened in the War, and at a time when it was very important we should make Americans understand our position. But, after all is said and done, it was not our propaganda that influenced opinion in America. It was enemy propaganda that did that. It is the custom in this country to admire German methods and use of propaganda. I have heard people express a strong wish that we had a similar system to the German system in order to make British ideas counteract German ideas. But I do not think German propaganda was well done. I entirely dissent from the doctrine that the Germans scored heavily by the way they put their views before foreign countries. The German touch is not a delicate one, and the propaganda which they carried on in the United States did far more to discredit the German case in the United States than anything our Department of Propaganda did. The doings of Germans in the United States were exposed not by our propaganda, but by the enterprise of American newspapers and by Americans in this country, who of their own accord thoroughly exposed the tangles of German propaganda and did so much to bring America into the War. I speak as something of a sceptic of the effects of this political propaganda in foreign countries. Judging by results, from what was done by the Department of Information in the early days of the War I think very little good has been derived by this country from the vast sums of money we have spent on this purpose. I suppose it was some recognition of the failure of our efforts which led the Government to a reorganisation of the Information Department. It is a very curious thing that each of the reorganisations has resulted in a larger superstructure, and in more changes at the bottom, while the work is being done less efficiently as the outcome. We started with Mr. Masterman working practically by himself at Wellington House, then came Colonel Buchan, who was put over him, and then we had Lord Beaverbrook, who was put over Colonel Buchan. We have all three of them now.

Sir C. HENRY Wellington House has gone now.

Mr. JONES Yes; the Department started modestly. For a long time it had no hotel; now the officials have secured an hotel, and the Howard Hotel is its headquarters. It has the status of a Ministry. I want to ask the Government, Why has this great change been made? Why this immense superstructure? What is there left to be done? We are reaching the time in this War when the need for propaganda is nearly over. The nations have made up their minds; you do not need any longer to tell them what we are fighting for. The whole of the nations know that the issue is between liberty and despotism, and they have ranged themselves on one side or the other. [An HON. MEMBER: "What about the Member for Blackburn?"] He does not agree with me about the War, but he has more sense than some of the people who cry out against him. I repeat that on the whole the world has made up its mind about the issue which is being fought out on the plains of Flanders. The nations have taken their stand by our side. It is a war between the free nations of the world and despotism, and there is now no need to be pouring out by the million pamphlets on elementary matters such as these. You are wasting your time and your energy, and that has been so far recognised that Wellington House has been closed down, yet Wellington House is the part of the Ministry which really produced the best results, which gave more information and by which more knowledge was shown in the pamphlets which were issued. Lord Beaverbrook has been placed in charge of the Ministry. He is a Minister without salary, we are told, and he is recommended on that account. I prefer Ministers with salaries. Ministers with salaries are answerable to the country which pays them. I do not believe in placing a great Department in the hands of unpaid men. If you really want to induce responsibility you must pay men for their work. We may have an unpaid Minister saying to us if we complain, "We do your work for nothing, and we decline to be talked to by paid Members of Parliament." I very much prefer that Ministers should be paid salaries commensurate with their work. And it is of some importance that we should know something about these men, in whose hands has been placed the difficult and responsible task, and the delicate task, of defending the honour of the Empire and this country, and of justifying the freedom on which the Empire is based. After all, it is a Ministry of Information, and the value of information depends at least in some degree on the people from whom it comes. Now let us take the Ministry—and one has to gather information where one can, and I hope my hon. Friend will correct me if I go wrong. The Minister in charge is Lord Beaverbrook. Lord Beaverbrook is known to most of us. He sat in this House for sometime. [An HON. MEMBER: "And did nothing!"] Though he took no prominent part in the Debates in

the Chamber, he is supposed to have had influence behind the scenes, and it is confidently stated by those who profess to know that Lord Beaverbrook rivals Lord Northcliffe himself in the merit of having brought down the late Government and substituted the present Coalition Government. Lord Beaverbrook is a man interested in commerce. He is a director of seven companies. He takes an interest in banks, in power companies, in railways, and in newspapers. [An HON. MEMBER: "And cement!"] I will take that from my hon. Friend. It is so difficult to find out all the facts in these cases. A question was put to the Leader of the House at Question Time as to whether Lord Beaverbrook had given up his directorships.

The CHANCELLOR of the EXCHEQUER (Mr. Bonar Law). No; it was in connection with the employés of the Ministry. I understand Lord Beaverbrook has given up all his directorships.

Mr. JONES I am very glad to hear it. My information was otherwise, but I am glad to have that from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I think that has been observed in Administrations for some time past, and I hope the present Government will adhere to the same rule, and insist that men placed in responsible offices shall not have divided and distracting influences involved in the continuance of great posts in the commercial world. Mr. Snagge is Secretary to the Ministry. He is a director of nine companies, and seems chiefly interested in rubber. The Director of Information in Scandinavia and Spain is Mr. Hambro, a Member of the House, a banker, a railway director, and, I understand, he is placed in charge of information in Scandinavia and Spain because he has business connections with those countries. I venture to suggest that is not a very good reason for placing him in charge of propaganda in those countries. [An HON. MEMBER: "An excellent reason!"] I think it is a good reason for employing his organisation for carrying out the decisions of others in regard to propaganda in those countries, but it seems to me an unfortunate thing that you should make him Director of Propaganda in a country solely because he has business connections there, and to give him power to decide what shall be spent and how it is spent in propaganda is to incur great danger, and I regret it has been done in this and other cases in the Ministry. My hon. Friend opposite approves of it, and thinks it is the right way. Take the Director of Propaganda for Switzerland—Mr. Guinness, who is a director of nine companies. His interests are divided between insurance, tubes, railways, and Pullman cars, and I suppose his connection with Switzerland is the Pullman car. Colonel Bryan, who assists in American propaganda, is director of six companies mainly interested in ships and shipbuilding. Colonel Galloway, Assistant Director of Hospitality, is a director of five or six companies. His interests are divided between gas, iron, and railways.

Mr. SWIFT MacNEILL And cigars!

Mr. JONES No; that is Mr. Cunliffe Owen. He is the gentleman who is interested in tobacco. He is a director of thirty-six companies. I understand they are all tentacles of a great tobacco trust of which Mr. Cunliffe Owen is vice-chairman. This gentleman is placed in charge of propaganda throughout Asia and the Far East, including Japan.

Mr. MacCALLUM SCOTT Does my right hon. Friend know of any individual who has a more valuable connection right through China and Japan for purposes of propaganda?

Mr. JONES That is a very good reason for employing this gentleman to carry out propaganda, but not to direct propaganda. [An HON. MEMBER: "He does not!"]

Mr. WHYTE Does he direct propaganda?

Mr. JONES I understand he is the Director of Propaganda in those countries. I should be extremely glad if I am wrong in that respect. As editor of the Allied Wireless, Lord Beaverbrook has secured Mr. Tewson. This is a very interesting appointment. Mr. Tewson was formerly editor of the Hearst newspapers in London, which were notoriously unfriendly to this country until America entered the War.

Sir H. DALZIEL Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that Mr. Tewson resigned his appointment of over £1,000 a year because he disagreed with the Hearst policy?

Mr. JONES I did not know that. If so, it is greatly to his credit. I am very glad to have heard that. It is a very creditable incident in his career. Finally, we have the Director for the British Empire, Lord Rothermere, who is director of two companies concerned with papers. Lord Northcliffe I may not mention in this connection. [An HON. MEMBER: "Why?"] Because he is not part of the Ministry of Information. He is careful in to-day's "Times" to point out that he has no share in the improvement which Lord Beaverbrook has effected in the Ministry of Information, but that all the credit there is due to Lord Beaverbrook, and is not in the least to be shared by Lord Northcliffe. That is the Ministry of Information, and the House will observe that these gentlemen represent the most formidable combination at the Ministry of Information. The interests represented are banks, electric power companies, gas, railways, newspapers, rubber, insurance, iron, steel, Pullman cars, ships, and tobacco—a wholly formidable combination, and it is natural that this body of eminent business men should wish to play a great part. They are not there to carry on the hum-drum work of an office. The world is their stage, and they mean to play a great part there. They are not people to be put upon by Treasury Regulations. I understand they consider they are better judges of the payment to give officials than the Treasury, and the business mind runs to high salaries. Let us see how this power is to be exercised. Lord Beaverbrook began in connection with information, as I have said, as Chairman of the War Office Committee for the Production of War Films. Now he controls all the official film business, and I suppose he is the sole producer—at any rate, the sole censor—of what films shall be produced. See what an immense power that puts in his hands! Take, for instance, the great film of "The Man who Saved the Empire." [An HON. MEMBER: "Who is he?"] It is in Lord Beaverbrook's power to decide that. He has to put the portrait in the film. He can put the Prime Minister in; he can put General Haig, or Admiral Beatty, or Lord Beaverbrook. It is in his power to decide who is the man who really has saved the Empire, and then Lord Beaverbrook has no part according to the—prospectus, I was going to say—programme in home propaganda, but he is doing it.

I have a record of a very extraordinary film which is being performed now. I have had it from an eye-witness—I have not seen it myself—of a performance at Manchester on the 24th July of a play film. Usually they are comparatively unimportant official films, such as a burglar breaking into a safe and stealing a document which eventually turns out to be an intimation to buy War Bonds. That no doubt accounts for the satisfactory return of War Bonds purchases which the Chancellor of the Exchequer brought before us last week. But on Wednesday, 24th July, there was a departure. The title of the picture was "Once a Hun, always a Hun." It first of all depicts two German soldiers in a ruined town in France. They meet a woman with a baby in her arms, and strike her to the ground. The two German soldiers then gradually merge into two commercial travellers, and are seen in an English village after the War. One of the travellers enters a small village general store, and proceeds to show to the shopkeeper a pan. The shopkeeper at the beginning is somewhat impressed by what is offered him for sale, when his wife comes in and, turning the pan upside down, sees marked on it "Made in Germany." She then indulges in a good deal of scorn at the expense of the commercial traveller and calls in a policeman, who orders the German out of the shop. A final notice flashed on the screen was to the effect that there cannot possibly be any more trading with these people after the War, and under this statement were the words, "Ministry of Information." The question of the policy of trade after the War has got to be decided by this country, but I hope the Ministry of Information does not intend to decide it before we have an opportunity even of discussing the Government policy. More than that, I want to put some other questions. If this sort of thing is to be done, are pans alone to have the advantage of this advertisement? What about iron and steel, cotton and wool, non-ferrous metals, dyes, and ships? Are these not to be advertised in this way? Let us have fair play all round and not pans alone. But, putting aside all jesting, I think it is a scandal that public money should be spent at the present time by the Government in order to push a policy which they may hold, but which this House was certainly returned to oppose eight years ago, and which has never been undone by any direction of this country or the House.

It is not only in respect to films that Lord Beaverbrook has taken control, but there are war pictures and photographs; are they all going to be put under Lord Beaverbrook? Is he going to be sole draftsman? Is he alone to sanction what the illustrated papers are to publish? What about plays? There was an enterprise a while ago in which a Mr. Grein was concerned for producing plays worthy of the British race on the Continent. Mr. Grein showed more zeal than discretion, because he blazoned to the world, following the example of his superiors, I must say, about the great appointment that had been given to him by the Ministry of Information. This was repudiated by the Ministry of Information, and, I suppose, Mr. Grein will no longer produce his plays. This is interesting, as showing whether or not there was a necessity for Mr. Grein to produce British plays in Scandinavia and in Holland that he was carefully instructed not to produce Shakespeare's plays there because Shakespeare was better acted in Holland and Scandinavia than Mr. Grein could possibly hope to present the plays. If Shakespeare was really so well acted, and if the public in those countries are thoroughly familiar with Shakespeare's plays, I do not think the Government need be at all anxious in that direction in respect to the Continent. We come to another Department, that of the War Correspondents. Is it true that Lord Beaverbrook wishes to take over the control of the war correspondents at the front? We at home have been accustomed to get messages comparatively free from interference from correspondents at the front. Is it true that Lord Beaverbrook is going to do this? I want an answer to that question. Another thing: Visitors go to visit the front. Is it the case that Lord Beaverbrook insists in being the shepherd-in-chief to all the visitors to the battle front?—[An HON. MEMBER: "Nonsense!"]

Mr. JONES Is it true, too, that Lord Beaverbrook wanted to get into his hands the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office and the Admiralty, and that now he wants the War Office? If so, is the Government going to give in to him? These are questions on which I desire information. But he is going further. He appears to desire control of the wireless world. He wants to control the news to be flashed all over the world. It is to be collected in London and redistributed, and I am not at all sure that this will stop with the War. I see a very interesting announcement, a Resolution of the Imperial War Conference dealing with an Imperial News Service, "with the object of securing an adequate news service available in all parts of the British Empire through British sources." What does that mean? If that merely means that there are greater facilities to be provided, well and good; but if it means that the Government are going to control the news, to collect it all through agents, and prohibit the publication of any news that is not their news, and distribute their news throughout the world, then it is a matter which merits the attention of this House and of the country. A power like that Resolution suggests, along with the censorship, which is being most rigorously exercised at the present time, is most dangerous to the freedom of the people of this country. One more thing. There is talk of a daily newspaper being provided for the soldiers at the front to contain Government information. If that is to be like the films that are being shown, it will be used for propaganda purposes which are not of the War. A General Election is coming on. Is this newspaper subsidised by the Government to be circulated among the soldiers? Is it to contain electioneering propaganda for the electors at the front? Remember, they will be dependent wholly, not upon meetings, but upon the circulation of information to them. I view with the profoundest suspicion this suggestion that the Government are to run a daily newspaper. This will go hand-in-hand with a rigorous censorship. I find it very hard to believe that all this is really a war measure at all. I find it impossible to believe that this great combination of business interests is building up in the closing years of the War propaganda work proper, for that work, in regard to the attitude of this country, and so forth, is practically at an end. The matter is decided, and the world knows that for which we are fighting. I find it impossible to believe that this immense organisation is being put up solely for war purposes. I believe it is intended to carry it on after the War. I ask the Government to make that clear. News is gathered to a centre, sorted, sifted, and strained through Government strainers and then distributed to the world. Newspapers are to be controlled, and will publish Government news. Wrong opinions will be suppressed. The Empire is to be advertised!

Mr. DENNISS All this for nothing?

Mr. JONES All that for nothing. I ask my hon. Friend opposite, Are they to do all that for nothing? What does he think? He is familiar with business. Does he think that this is all being done for nothing? [An HON. MEMBER: "No!"] I regard the whole thing with suspicion. I admit I am prejudiced, but I think the whole thing is detestably vulgar. But that is not the worst thing. It is a real danger to the freedom of this country. We entered this War a free nation, with free institutions, free services, with Free Trade, freedom of speech and of opinion. Remember, we could go where we pleased and do what we choose so long as we kept the laws which we ourselves had made. We are in danger of ending the War with surrender, not to the Germans—whom we shall conquer—but to German ideals, to German methods, to German systems of government. Free service has gone; free opinion is not allowed to be expressed; free speech is non-existent. Free Trade is threatened. The Government talk of an election. The sooner we have it the better—if we are to have a free election! Do not let the Government deceive themselves. They have been face to face with great labour unrest. Do they know the cause of it?

An HON. MEMBER The Ministry of Information!

Mr. JONES The one cause really of the whole of the labour unrest is not doubt or uncertainty about the War. It is not uncertainty as to the issue of the War. It is profound distrust of the Government and all their ways.

Mr. PRINGLE Espionage!

Mr. JONES Bargains have not been kept. Agreements have not been observed. The whole truth is not told to the people in the speeches and publications of the Government. Ministers have boasted that they have made special pronouncements with the idea of influencing the country in a particular direction. I would remind the Government that they are dealing with the people of England, a people which have never long submitted to the tyranny of priest, king, soldier, or politician. I warn them that the people have taken their measure and are not to be fooled. The people mean to win the War, and, having won the War, they will contemptuously shake off the bonds you are putting about them while they fight, and will restore liberty at home as they have saved it for the world.

Mr. PRINGLE I do not intend to follow my right hon. Friend, either into the general or detailed analysis which he has made of this strange, extraordinary, anomalous Ministry. Some hon. Members seem to entertain doubts as to the validity of his arguments relating to the irregular position and the multiplicity of the directors of companies who hold posts of importance in this Ministry. I think, however, on a little reflection, that it will be clear to the great majority of hon. Members that such a situation is not only contrary to the traditions of our public life, but is liable to very grave and serious abuse. We have been told, for example, that directors of propaganda in various neutral countries are men with extensive business interests in those countries and directors of numerous companies which are operating in those countries. We are also told that these people, that these extensive interests, are naturally the best people to direct the operation of propaganda in these countries. It is true that they may be commended to the Ministry for the knowledge that they have of these countries, but there is a very grave objection which seems to me to be absolutely insuperable in respect to their action in such a responsible position. We all know the aim of advertising in modern commercial life. We know, for example, that the elaborate work of this Ministry is done by means of advertising.

Sir C. HENRY In this country?

Mr. PRINGLE My hon. Friend knows that I am dealing with the neutral countries at the present time. I say you have appointed men with extensive business interests in those countries who have the power to dispose to advertising of such a value as has never before been in the hands of any individual. I hope that the House will see that it is not a proper thing that the advertising for purposes of the British Government should be in the hands of people in those countries whose business interest can obviously be served by the direction in which that advertising is used. That is an important consideration. New light, however, is shed upon this question of this Directorial Civil Service when my right hon. Friend told the interesting story of the film, "Once a Hun, always a Hun." That is a business film! It only refers to pans, it is true, but the principle goes through every sphere of our industrial life. We can understand perfectly

well how the directors of all these companies, who, in former days, had to work in competition with the Germans, are interested in seeing films of this kind exhibited, not only throughout the United Kingdom, but throughout the Allied countries. It is going to promote their financial interests. We do not want the propaganda of this country carried on so as to promote the financial interests of any section of individuals in the country. We must separate the propaganda of the cause of this country from the promotion of any financial or unselfish interests whatever. If that propaganda is for one moment to be mixed up with these financial and selfish interests, then I say you are going to do more than anything else to discredit the cause of the country, not only in the eyes of our own people, but in the eyes of people of other countries.

From this interesting film I am naturally led to the other point—and this is the main point. After all, in regard to the Ministry of Propaganda, or Ministry of Information, a large part of the operations of this Ministry are not propaganda for the country but propaganda for the Government. There are articles published in the Colonial Press, for example, which do not deal with the great principles for which this country stands or with the conduct of the War. They are simply articles in glorification of the present Government and nobody else. Many of them also cast reflections of a somewhat disgraceful character upon others, who at another time have been responsible for the Government. I say that is not how public money ought to be used. It is bad enough to use public money in this country for that purpose, but I think it is worse to have this kind of thing spread abroad from one end of the Empire to the other. I think it has already been the policy of the Government of this country, until recent months, to separate the conduct and prosecution of the War from the political fortunes of special individual who may be, for the time being, associated with the Government. We all know that there is a General Election looming in the future, and we have at the Ministry of Information the means of making elections. We never have had made elections in this country before, but there have been made elections in Continental countries and in democratic countries. We know what the Minister of Interior is able to do in France in making elections, and we are having something of the same kind introduced here for the first time in this country. It is a grave departure from the best traditions of the political life of this country that anything of the kind should take place.

I am not speaking without some information as to what has been going on, not officially on the part of this Department, but undoubtedly those responsible to it have, in many of the things which they have done, shown more concern as to the future fortunes of the Gentlemen who, for the time being, occupy the Treasury Bench than the successful prosecution of the War. We do not believe that those who are at the head of our great public services should give their time and attention to matters of this kind. For example, the Ministry of Information know all that is going on in the Press of this country. Every newspaper is read in the Ministry of Information, and if there is a paragraph referring to the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer it goes to the Ministry of Information, and what happens? Probably there is a note sent to the editor asking why he said so-and-so about the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Prime Minister, and what can the editor do? The editor knows that he is responsible to these people for the news which he can print. [An HON. MEMBER: "He is warned!"] He knows that if he is friendly to the Ministry of Information he will get news and advanced information about the events of the future. It is not a matter of coercion, but there is this indirect compulsion, and a mere note from the Ministry to any editor is as coercive a thing as can be done by the most intimidatory Government. That is intolerable, and the House should insist, whatever happens in regard to this Ministry, that these powers and these resources should on no account be used for that purpose.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Leif Jones) referred to another aspect of the operations of this House. He spoke of labour unrest. I am told that there is a Department of home information in connection with the Ministry of Information which is, in effect, a special secret service, that they have men employed who are spies upon the labour movement of this country, that they have sought to enlist into their service leaders in various parts of the trade union movement, and that large pecuniary inducements have been held out to these men, and sometimes they have been successful. That Department, I believe, was originally in the Ministry of Munitions, but that Ministry

discovered how unfortunate its action was and gave up all responsibility for it. I have, however, personal knowledge of cases where important leaders in the trade union movement in this country have been approached by this Department for the purpose of spying upon their fellows, and making secret reports in regard to their actions to the Government, and I think it is also safe to say that some of the men employed in this Department have not confined themselves to that action, but have gone so far as to deliberately excite men to strike, and to do even worse things than strike.

Mr. DILLON That is the Irish system!

Mr. PRINGLE There is very good reason for that. The profession of spying in this country is not recognised. We are not like Russia.

Mr. DILLON Nor like Ireland!

Mr. PRINGLE In this country no reputable man declines to enter upon the calling of a spy if it is against our enemies abroad, but no reputable man would spy upon his own fellow citizens in this country, and the consequence is that the Ministry which enters upon operations of this kind has had to depend upon an inferior type of men, without any sense of honour or obligation, men practically without morality, and you have had some of the agents of the Government in this Department deliberately inciting to strike. What is the effect on the labour movement? Can you wonder at there being suspicion; can you wonder at mistrust and unrest if these things are going on? You are bringing about a situation where a man cannot trust his neighbour, where they know the Government will not act in the open, but is acting in secret. You have all sorts of subterranean influences at work. It is not only the failure of the Government to redeem its pledges, but the knowledge that the Government is spying upon them through its own hidden agents in this way that makes it difficult to have that condition of confidence which is absolutely essential to the maintenance of industrial peace. Those are some of the main grounds why this House should look, first of all, with suspicion upon the operations of this Vote, and should insist upon a searching investigation into its expenditure, and that is why we should leave no stone unturned to prevent the un-British methods which I have described and stigmatised as taking a place in the public policy of this country.

Sir F. BANBURY As chairman of the Sub-committee which carried on the investigation into the accounts of the Ministry of Information, I should like to say that nothing came before us such as has just been outlined by the hon. Member who has just spoken. I hope that in three or four months' time my Sub-committee will further investigate the proceedings of the Ministry, and I will endeavour to see whether there is any foundation for the statements which the hon. Gentleman has just made. So far, nothing of that sort came before us. I do not want to say very much on this subject, because the Report speaks for itself, but I wish to say that I think the system adopted of sending out large masses of circulars was not very efficacious. We all know what the majority of people do who receive circulars; they put them in the waste paper basket. The sending out of large blocks of circulars—which, from the evidence given, was in certainly one, if not two, cases allowed to remain for some time in sheds and warehouses, so that if they were read at all they were out of date—does not seem to me to have been a useful policy. At the Committee we were brought four or five blocks in order to show what sort of information was being sent out, and one of those books was an illustrated history of the life of the Prime Minister. Of course, there was no history in it at all.—[An HON. MEMBER: "Who wrote it?"]—I do not know, but it was very nicely illustrated with pictures of his children and himself in various walks of life. But it did seem to me that, however interesting the book might be to me as a Member of Parliament, it certainly was not interesting to the ordinary person in foreign countries, and it could not have been said that it would exercise any influence upon the conduct or the course of the War. The question of finance, which is really what the Committee were there to look into, is a very serious one.

Sir H. DALZIEL Was it before or after the appointment of Lord Beaver-brook that that book was issued?

Sir C. HENRY I think it was before.

Sir M. BARLOW Is it not a fact that the Prime Minister's life was circulated in America under the previous regime?

5.0 P.M.

Sir F. BANBURY I am not aware of it. With regard to the expenditure up to the 31st of March, 1917, it amounted to something like £750,000, which is an extremely large sum, and the methods of that expenditure were severely criticised by two gentlemen, who sent in a Report to the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Trinity College (Sir E. Carson). Before we made up our minds to make any comment upon these Reports we asked the gentleman whose conduct was criticised to attend before the Committee and to give us their side of the matter. I dare say it is quite true that their criticisms were somewhat exaggerated, but, as we say in our Report, I am inclined to think that the idea was still prevalent that money was of very little consequence as long as a certain amount of work was achieved. When we came to the Estimate for the current year ending the 31st of March, 1919, we were informed by the two accounting officers that the amount to be spent was between £1,800,000 and £1,900,000. That is a very large sum to spend upon matters of this sort. We were extremely careful to get the exact figures of this Estimate, which were given us in May. Towards the end of June Lord Beaverbrook gave evidence before the Committee, and his estimate of the expenditure for the current financial year was £1,200,000, or one-third less. The two accounting officers were purposely examined separately, and it is a little extraordinary that their estimates should more or less tally and that within five or six weeks there should have been an opportunity of reducing the estimate from £1,800,000 to £1,200,000. It is evident that Lord Beaverbrook is desirous of effecting economy. It is also evident that the prior estimate was very badly prepared, because unless it had been badly prepared it would have been impossible to reduce it in so short a time. The explanation that was given to us by Lord Beaverbrook was that Wellington House was to be done away with, and that by a combination of the two Departments they would save something between £400,000 and £500,000 per year. There were also to be other economies, chiefly with regard to cables. However that may be, it is very necessary, and I am very glad that the suggestion has been made to-day, that the Committee should visit the Department in three or four months' time with the object of seeing whether this reduction has really been carried out. There is one other point which I am afraid I must allude to before I sit down. It is not an agreeable thing to have to do, and I only do it because I believe it is my duty. I refer to the payment made to a Member of this House?

Mr. SNOWDEN Who was it?

Sir F. BANBURY That does not matter.

Mr. SNOWDEN Oh, yes it does.

Sir F. BANBURY I am not imputing any blame to the hon. Member.

Mr. T. M. HEALY Was it in the time of the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Dublin University (Sir E. Carson)?

Sir F. BANBURY The payments began in July, 1917, and terminated on 31st May last.

Mr. HEALY That is the time of the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Sir F. BANBURY The right hon. and learned Gentleman might have been there for about three months, but I would not be quite certain. I forget exactly whether he was there or not, but it is not the point. What I want to emphasise is this: I am not at all sure that it has not vacated the hon. Member's seat, because I have taken the trouble to look up the Bills creating the new Departments, and I find in all of them that there are express provisions to say that certain persons may hold seats in this House, and the hon. Gentleman in question is not included among them. The danger is this. If the Government—and it really is a very serious thing—are to say to a Member of Parliament, "We require to give you several hundreds per year," which way is that hon. Member to vote in the Lobby? [An HON. MEMBER: What is the

payment for?] For attending and assisting one of the directors at an office in London. I wish to urge upon the Government that they will do nothing to encourage the system which undoubtedly existed for some 150 or 200 years of payments to Members of Parliament by which their votes in the Lobby were influenced.

Major BOWDEN Does the right hon. Gentleman suggest that there is any reflection upon this hon. Member?

Sir F. BANBURY I stated that I did not in any kind of way wish to impute any blame to the hon. Member himself. My quarrel is with the Government for making such a proposal to a Member. I do not want to say anything more. I think that I have said enough. I only do it from a strong sense of duty, because I believe it is absolutely necessary if the purity of this House is to be maintained that nothing of the sort should occur again.

Sir MONTAGUE BARLOW The whole subject which we are discussing to-day is a very difficult one, and in regard to which in the end we must largely trust the Government. Personally, I hold no brief for the Department, and some of the things brought to light in this Report seem to me, to put it mildly, not entirely satisfactory, but I think that a good deal that has been said by way of criticism of the Department, at any rate, as it is at present constituted, is hardly fair. I do not think anyone could find exception to the speech of the right hon. Gentleman who opened the Debate (Mr. Leif Jones). He put the case very fairly and on broad lines, and in a humorous way which relieved what might otherwise have been a lengthy attack, but the speech of the hon. Member for North-West Lanark (Mr. Pringle) was one of those incidents where we should have liked a little more fair treatment. He made a general accusation about spies and so on, but he gave us no evidence of it, and an accusation of that kind against a Government Department should not be made without evidence behind it. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for the Eushcliffe Division gave us the history of the Department. He traced very clearly—it was very desirable that it should be traced—how the Department had developed, and he gave us to understand that, at any rate during its early days, it met entirely with his approval.

I have had the pleasure or honour of being allowed to do a certain amount of Government work in certain Allied and neutral countries during the War—in France, Italy, and America—and all I can say with regard to the propaganda in America in the early days—I think it met with the special approbation of the right hon. Gentleman—is that, while there was a good deal of effort put into it, it did not achieve a result in the least commensurate with that effort, partly because it was organised and arranged exactly through those printed books of which the right hon. Gentleman spoke with a good deal of commendation. The fact is that each country has its own methods of approach. The right hon. Gentleman, for instance, complained that in approaching Russia the Government had not made use of those with a knowledge of the Russian language and Russian conditions, and he admitted that it was very difficult. That has been proved of almost every country, and it is the great difficulty. I have the pleasure of knowing America well. I have been going there for a good many years regularly, and I have been twice during the War. If ever there was a country that required to have propaganda organised and arranged on terms which it will accept, America is that country. At that time, of course, America was neutral, and I remember, when I came home first, thinking how much the interviews which the Germans were affording to leading newspaper correspondents in Berlin were advancing the German cause in America, whereas the personal interview, with the personal touch, which is the great channel of information in America—anyone who knows America will agree with me—was not being utilised at all by our leading statesmen.

Mr. JONES Does the hon. Gentleman really think that the German propaganda as it was carried on in America was effective for German purposes?

Sir M. BARLOW I think that as propaganda it was, but whenever Germany had made a good move in propaganda it was immediately destroyed by a brutal act of some kind. It was Germany's acts which destroyed the effect of what she was doing in her Press. Over and over again I have seen a quite successful coup in propaganda brought off by Count Bernstoff when he was at Washington and the effect of it destroyed at once by some particularly brutal act of Germany in Belgium or on the high seas. Therefore, if you ask me whether, as a matter of propaganda, it had any effect, I say at once that I think it had. But luckily for us the most effective propaganda for the Allied cause in America was the

brutality of the Germans themselves. In this country we have to recognise frankly that we are very bad at publicity and at advertising. We are very bad at making our good deeds known. [Cheers.] I suppose those ironical cheers mean that we have no good deeds to make known.

Mr. S. MacNEILL Have you ever heard of the Pharisees?

Sir M. BARLOW Oh, yes; I have heard of lots of them in Ireland. I do not take that view, but, if anyone doubts the difficulties of the English people in using legitimate advertisement, I should like to commend to them a publication got together by the Board of Trade. It is rather out of date now, and I wish they would bring it out again. It is a publication giving excerpts from the reports of our commercial travellers, and it is a long indictment, from the point of view of publicity, of the incapacity of the ordinary British trader. It speaks of his refusal to adopt the weights and measures, and the language and so on, of the country in which he seeks to trade. If that was true of our ordinary trade and of peace conditions, it is still more abundantly true in a time of war like the present, because in a war like this such publicity as is done has to be done as a matter of the State by organisation from headquarters, and that hitherto has never been done at all. Our responsible Ministers did not understand the necessity of it at the beginning of the War, but each Government has been more and more compelled by the facts of the case to develop and enlarge the publicity or advertising of our aims and of what we are doing. I have had it brought home to me in France, Italy, and America that the result of what England was doing, very often in the country itself, were not sufficiently known. I have seen difficulties arise in America because it was not understood what was happening with regard to the black list or the searching of the mails. When the case was put and it was explained that we were doing a great deal less than they did to us in the Civil War—when it was all put quite clearly, frankly, and calmly—I would undertake to carry any American audience with me. Unfortunately, there was nobody putting our case. It was just the same in Italy with regard to the supply of coal, though it may be better now. Some eighteen months ago, when I was there, the average Italian did not seem to understand at all what a great work this country was doing for Italy in the matter of the coal supply. Therefore, each country has been forced—and we certainly have not done as much as other countries have done—to take up this question of publicity, because, after all, in a time like this it is only the Government who can do it at all. If you once accept that we do not take to publicity at all naturally, and you accept the fact that it has to be done, then I think we are a long way towards accounting for any difficulties that may have arisen in this Department in the matter. When we are dealing with the Department itself we may bear in mind that the charges, so far as they are based on the Report just issued, are really ancient history. They do not, so far as I understand it, affect the Department as at present constituted.

Mr. J. HENDERSON Why not?

Sir M. BARLOW Because they relate to facts before the present Ministry was set up, and, so far as the present system is concerned, I agree, although the chairman expressed surprise, that one result is that the responsible Minister hopes to reduce the estimate by £600,000, and that is all to his credit, and is not a matter for criticism. That is the only point I want to elaborate at any length. The attack, so far as it was what you might call a constitutional attack, made by the right hon. Member for Rushcliffe on the Ministry related to the Treasury, and he went out of his way to say that he thought the Treasury was very much to blame. I should like to deal with that, because I think it is of great importance from the point of view of the War, and from the point of view of enlisting what I may call amateur energies in the War. You have to consider this question of Treasury control. The Report itself is a little contradictory, because it begins by blaming the Treasury in its relations with the Department, and then says the Treasury must have more control. Can you run a thing of this kind, where urgency is necessary at any rate in its early stages, on the ordinary lines of a Government Department? That is the whole question. The Minister did what I believe was the perfectly proper and right thing to do. He said, "I have not time to go to the Treasury to get a decision on each point. If I do it will be three, six, eight, ten months, or a year, before anything is done at all. I will do what an ordinary business man does—I will get a first-class firm of accountants and let them lay down the broad lines of policy." What we want during a time like this is two things. We want prompt, efficient service and reasonable security. I do not say down to every cigar, but that

there is no substantial waste of public money. The best way to secure these two things, prompt and efficient work and a reasonable safeguard, is to do what the ordinary business man would do, and to call in a first-class firm of accountants to lay down the broad lines on which expenditure can properly be made. If the House will forgive a personal reminiscence—because in this war work we have all our contributions to make from our own experience—I had an experience not at all unlike what has taken place at the Ministry of Information. In the early days of the War, when I was entrusted by Lord Kitchener at the War Office with the responsibility of raising, equipping, clothing and housing what started as a battalion and grew into a whole brigade of five battalions, it was from one point of view a ridiculous position, because the War Office treated me as personally responsible. All the accounts were in my name, I paid all the cheques in connection with the building of the camp, the fitting out of the men, for their pay and equipment, and generally all out-goings—clothing and everything. That meant a very large expenditure for what eventually totalled up to 7,000 men for over a year. If I had had to go to the Treasury for every expenditure that was not quite normal—and, of course, we were bound to have a great many abnormal expenses—it would have been unworkable, because the men were coming in very fast. We very often took 300 a day; the thing had to be done at a great pace; the country was clamouring for men. I did get the first expenditure sanctioned by the Treasury, and it took me days to get it through. Eventually the only thing was to go to the War Office and say, "You must give me a maximum expenditure. I will take on the best firm of chartered accountants in Manchester, and let them lay down the lines on which it should be done, and if that is agreed I must go ahead, because otherwise we shall never go ahead at all. I am willing to guarantee that eventually the accounts will pass to the Treasury, but I must not be held up with daily, weekly, or monthly expenses for an uncertain time, because, if you do that, the thing will never be finished."

Mr. JONES Did the hon. and gallant Gentleman agree with the Treasury as to the form of the accounts?

Sir M. BARLOW I did not. That would have hung us up so long that we would never have had the men. I could not do it. I was hung for three weeks for a particular decision. The men were crowding in, and I could not get the food or clothing, and if I had taken my hon. Friend's advice at the time we might be held up now. At a time of crisis like this, if you want to get things through, you must allow a certain margin which you do not allow in ordinary times; otherwise you will not get the work done. I believe that is the real justification for the more or less irregular matters that may have happened in the past. Directly the new Minister came in he called in a chartered accountant and laid down broad lines of principle. I understand there is no irregularity now, that proper arrangements have been made with the Treasury, that the thing is in order, and that it is only with regard to the past that there is any difficulty. The sum mentioned is £1,000,000—a large sum, I agree; but if there is any result that has been achieved about which, like the right hon. Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. L. Jones), I am a little sceptical, the amount expended is a small one compared with the sums which have been expended like water in other directions. For instance, to-day there was a question asked about 6,000 lbs. of food which has been wasted, and in innumerable quarters there is a great waste of money. We are rather chopping small straws when we deal with the expenditure of the Ministry of Information, provided, as I think is the case, that the work is being efficiently done and good results achieved in foreign countries.

Mr. ROBERTSON Will the hon. Member explain to us the nature of the propaganda now being carried on in foreign countries?

Sir M. BARLOW I am not at the Ministry of Information and I cannot tell. So far as I have been in communication recently with friends in Italy, France, and America—above all, in America—there is great evidence that during the last twelve months, since America came into the War and the changes took place at the Ministry of Information there has been not only, as would be natural, an awakening in America of interest in this country; but there has also been a much greater and more live willingness to give the kind of information, and to send the kind of lecturers, and so on than there was originally.

Mr. ROBERTSON Is it a matter of lectures?

Sir M. BARLOW Very largely. For instance, to take only one lecturer, when I was in the United States he was holding wonderful audiences.

Mr. S. MacNEILL Who was that?

Sir M. BARLOW Captain Beith—Ian Hay—the author of "The First Hundred Thousand." The audiences he was drawing and the success he was having from the point of view of the real issues of this War were admirable. I do not want, however, to be led into details of that kind; I only want to say that from the advices I get from these three countries there is more real live work done now than was done before, and in view of that the amount expended is rather a bagatelle and a good deal of the criticism is misdirected.

Mr. ROBERTSON I have listened with close attention and interest to the speech of the hon. Gentleman who has just sat down. I, personally, hoped that he was going to give us the information which we should like to have, namely, what is the new work that is being done under the new regime?

Sir M. BARLOW I do not know.

Mr. ROBERTSON I thought the hon. Member spoke with special knowledge.

Sir M. BARLOW I did not.

Mr. ROBERTSON Perhaps we shall get the information from the representative of the Treasury, although I am not at all sure that we shall. That is precisely the weak point in the whole case. For my purpose I shall say nothing about finance. That has been very competently handled by my two hon. Friends on this bench. For the purposes of argument I grant the hon. Member his case, that we should not inquire very closely into expenditure, even on such a scale, if we are getting the results. What the House really wants to know is what results are being got and what means are being used to get results. I understood the hon. Member to agree with the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. L. Jones) as to the value of what we may call literary propaganda. He spoke of printed books as if they did not amount to much.

Sir M. BARLOW So far as America is concerned, I do not think the printed pamphlet or book is worth what has been put into it. The proper methods there are the interview and the lecture.

Mr. ROBERTSON I know something of America, and I think a great many Americans would resent the suggestion that they would be more influenced as to the particular part they would take on great questions of political action solely by the methods of the interview and the lecture. The people of America are as enlightened and educated as the people of this country. If we are to be told that our methods of propaganda by literature and printed book are of small account compared with the interview and the lecture, I should say it is false. I would not for a moment discount the work of lecturing, having done a good deal of that sort of work in my life. I suggest to the House that precisely the best work done in our propaganda was done before the new regime began. All we have got to-day seems to me to be this, that under the new regime there is a great deal more attention paid to picture shows and the films. I do not know whether or not it is the case that an illustrated life of the Prime Minister is a feature of the present regime or was an earlier institution. [An HON. MEMBER: "It was earlier!"] It is only in regard to such matters as this that we have had any information to-day. The last speaker said he had reason to believe that in Italy things were being better done, but he also avowed that he did not want to go into details. It is earnestly to be hoped that the Secretary to the Treasury will go into details, because there is a feeling in the House that the honour of the country is being compromised in this matter. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe gave us an account of a certain picture film which, as he described it, seemed to be a matter of common knowledge. If the description was accurate, it was an ignoble and contemptible business, whatever the propaganda was. The idea that this nation should be making it its propaganda to the world to send out a picture of two brutal Germans who afterwards appear as German commercial travellers, raises the question,

Has the Department any standard of dignity or of ability? In the next place does any sensible man believe that that kind of thing is going to influence the opinion of any people whose opinion is worth having on the subject? I do not doubt that in all countries there are people who are appealed to by films or by plays, but it is not those people who are going to determine the destinies of nations or the course this War is going to take. The kind of propaganda the hon. Member for South Salford (Sir M. Barlow) made light of and was a little sceptical about is precisely the propaganda that would appeal to the best minds. With regard to the United States, some of the very best propaganda was the spontaneously produced propaganda of Americans themselves, who, at the very beginning, were convinced of the justice of the cause. They paid for the printing of that literature, and it was circulated by the Propaganda Department in all directions. I believe it was translated into other languages. The testimony of these Americans was very good propaganda work. There is a fiction going about latterly that serious people—thinkers, writers, and propagandists—do not understand the art of advertising. The hon. Gentleman suggested that we, as a nation, do not understand it. I think he is mistaken. The arts of advertising have been very fully studied, and as regards the present Administration, it has as complete mastery of those arts as any other which has sat on that bench in my time. I demur to this assumption that great propaganda, the influencing of thought and opinion amongst civilised nations, is a thing to be carried on in the spirit of a successful commercial traveller, and that the kind of thing that constitutes good advertising for business is the kind of thing that constitutes good advertising in the case of a great nation and a great war. It is really an ignorant and a preposterous notion. That is not the way in which we have brought round opinion on our side in the Continental nations. It has been a battle of propaganda. In the neutral nations the Germans put their case and we put ours, and if, as I believe, in Europe as a whole the balance of that battle of propaganda has gone to the side of the Allies it is because they put forward the best literature, the best arguments, the most truthful and dispassionate statement, and not because they produced better films or more vulgar films, or did more useful advertising work.

The question that is really emerging from the whole Debate, and the one on which I hope the Secretary to the Treasury will give us some information is this: What kind of propaganda is now being done in foreign countries that is considered to be better, more worthy of this country, or more efficient than the propaganda that went on before? To allude to lectures now being delivered in the United States is surely a little beside the case. The United States is in the War. We have no occasion to propagandise in the United States. Lectures were being given there before, though I can remember it being said by many people who knew America well that we should be well advised not to send lecturers to the United States. We were constantly told, "Give the Germans rope enough, and they will, hang themselves. Their propaganda is injuring them. Your best policy is to hold your tongue." Our work was done for us in the finest possible way by those Americans who were on our side from the start. Is it a matter of lecturers? Are you sending lecturers to any of the neutral countries—Scandinavia or Holland—or is it a matter of films or plays or control of the Press? I will not quarrel over the amount of money. If such a Department exists, if we are to regard it as a Government Department, in spite of the fact that the Minister is not answerable to us and that his Secretary is not paid, if it is regarded as a Government Department at all, the honour of the country is concerned in our knowing what kind of work it is doing, and as we have had no real details on that subject I would specially appeal to the hon. Gentleman to give us what information he is in command of.

Colonel Sir M. WILSON I do not wish to speak as a politician, but only as a soldier. The information which you can get for the soldiers in the field you cannot pay too high a price for, and that information has undoubtedly been augmented and helped very much by the Ministry of which we are speaking to-day. I listened with very great interest to the able and humorous speech of the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Jones). There was one point he got hold of which was, perhaps, an unfortunate one, and that was the point about entertainment. I have spent many years of my life in foreign countries, and I am convinced that the reason why our countrymen have the name, and rightly so, of being the greatest colonists in the world is that when the Englishman goes to a foreign country he makes that country his home. When men of other nationalities go to foreign countries they go there with the intention of making as much money as they can, so as in their old age to spend it at home. The Englishman does not do that. He goes to a foreign country, makes it his home, and spends his money freely there.

Mr. SNOWDEN In India?

Sir M. WILSON In India, and elsewhere. I have been for many years in, India, and I am convinced on that point, too. I have been for three years of this War in Egypt and Palestine, and the prestige of the English name now in Egypt is higher than it has ever been. I put that down, to a very great extent, to the amount of money which has been spent in that country by the Australian soldiers. The Australian soldier has been there and has scattered his money about. That did great good to this country. It all helped. To my mind it is an unfortunate thing that anyone should tackle these entertainment allowances because it is by entertainment alone that not only can we gain a great amount of information, but we can also do a great amount of good in foreign countries. It is a very dangerous thing to try to censure a Department which started not very long ago—it had not started the last time I left England—because it is finding out information which is of the greatest value to our soldiers in the field. I did not know there was a Committee of Public Expenditure, when I returned to this country, which was looking into and ferretting out the money which has been spent in certain Departments. That is a very dangerous precedent. One thing we want to imbue our Ministers with is initiative. If they are going to have people trailing about behind them saying, "Look at what you have done here and look at what you have done there"; how is anyone going to have any initiative?

Mr. McCURDY I am sure the House has enjoyed the speech we have just listened to, as earlier in the day we enjoyed the equally humorous speech of my right hon. Friend (Mr. Jones). There seems to be a little doubt and uncertainty in the minds of hon. Members generally with regard to two matters on both of which it would have been just as well if we had known something before we started the Debate. One is, what is propaganda? and the other is, What is the Ministry of Information doing? I really was astonished to hear my right hon. Friend (Mr. Jones) say more than once that the time for propaganda had really passed. That was repeated by the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Robertson), who said, "Now that America had entered the War there was, of course, no longer any need for propaganda in America." I do not think hon. Members realise the important part which propaganda has played in this War. Consider for a moment what Germany has done by means of propaganda. It was by propaganda and not by any military success that she achieved the destruction of the mighty military Empire of the Czars.

Mr. JONES Was not the success of Germany in Russia due to penetration by German traders living in Russia and not at all by emissaries concerned with political propaganda?

Mr. McCURDY I am very much obliged to my right hon. Friend for confirming the accuracy of my statement. It was by political propaganda carried out by German agents in Russia and not by any military feat of arms that the destruction of that great Empire was attained.

Mr. SNOWDEN Can the hon. Member give us one shadow of evidence in support of that statement?

Mr. McCURDY I will deal with, that presently. If we turn to Italy, when Germany to all outward appearance came very near achieving a remarkable success some time ago it was due not to the number of troops or guns which she succeeded in bringing up at a critical moment, but to a pacifist propaganda which had been successfully carried on behind the Italian lines. If we turn from Europe to the East, no one can read the statement of Mr. Morgenthau, the late American Ambassador in Constantinople, without realising the immense importance which in the early stages of the War Germany attached to propaganda as a means of raising a holy war which, if it had been successful, would have been most embarrassing for the British Empire. There can be no doubt that the need for effective propaganda will continue so long as the War lasts, and if we had any doubt as to the necessity for propaganda in neutral countries it would be removed if we would look a little closer at home and ask ourselves whether there is no need for propaganda in Great Britain at present.

Mr. T. M. HEALY Great Britain and Ireland!

Mr. McCURDY I am not an expert on the subject of the sister island, and will not intrude in her domestic affairs. So far as this country is concerned I think this proposition will surely commend itself to hon. Members. We find ourselves involved in one of the greatest recorded events of history, in a war which for the magnitude and complexity of its issues has no parallel in our experience, and not all the propagandist efforts of the most zealous Department will ever be able fully to enlighten the people of this country upon all those matters upon which they should be informed if they are to form a sound judgment on what the policy of the country should be. It is suggested that there is some great mystery with regard to the actual operations of the Ministry. I have not been in any way connected with the Ministry of Information. I have not been asked to say anything on behalf of the Ministry of Information. So far as I know, the War Aims Committee, of which I am not a member, is itself in no way connected with the Ministry of Information. On coming into the House to-day and learning that this somewhat interesting topic would come on for discussion, I made inquiries from such channels as are available to any Member as to what the Ministry was actually doing. Certainly the account I received of their activities, though by no means sensational, is not destitute of interest. One of the first things the Germans did at the commencement of the War was to publish a newspaper, consisting almost entirely of illustrations, translated into all the different languages of the East, in order to promote German views with regard to this country. The Ministry of Information undertook the humdrum, but not unuseful, task of countering these activities by publishing a British paper under what I am sure hon. Members will agree is a proper name, "Truth," translated into Persian, Turkish, Chinese, and all the Eastern languages. This has been circulated broadcast. There is some doubt as to whether that is a useful service for this country. I may tell hon. Members that, according to my information, our Minister in Pekin has attributed the action of China in making her decisions to come on the side of the Allies entirely to the good effect which was produced by that branch of our propaganda.

Another branch of German propagandist activity with which we were familiar in the early days of the War was the German wireless. The German wireless reported German victories, sometimes before they had occurred, with very great promptitude, and the news so disseminated went to all the neutral countries. The Ministry of Information decided to set up a British system of wireless, and day to day our reports of the conduct of the great world battle are passing through the ether from this country across the Atlantic to America, Spain, Japan, Salonika, Aden, and they would pass into Russia and Roumania if there were any stations in those two countries to receive them. These wireless communications are not only sent out by the British Government, but there is a mutual arrangement by which France, Italy, and Great Britain send out a joint communication every day of the year. The Report of the Committee contains some reference to what on the face of it appears to be a large sum of money, £126,000, paid to Reuter's Agency. I suppose we are all perfectly familiar with the part which Wolff's Agency has played as an instrument of German propaganda from the early days of the War? Reuter's Agency is, of course, a far more important agency, looked at from the journalistic, newspaper, and business point of view than Wolff's, and the British Government, acting through the Ministry of Information, decided to do what they intended to keep secret for very obvious reasons, but which, now that it has been disclosed, we might as well comment upon. They decided to counter the German use of Wolff's by employing Reuter's Agency for the disseminating of accurate news to all parts of the neutral world. Hon. Members are familiar with the method by which the business of a great news agency like Reuter's is conducted. Journals in all parts of the world pay their annual subscriptions to Reuter's for a complete service for telegraphic news of interest. What our Government arranged was not that the service supplied by Reuter's should be altered or interfered with, but that there should be gratuitously added and cabled at the expense of this Government such information as the British Government officially desired to be communicated and to be at the disposal of newspaper proprietors and editors in all parts of the world. The Committee find that the cost of that transmission, together with a contribution in respect of establishment charges, of Reuter's Agency—I understand there is no profit item in the transaction at all—has been £126,000. I suggest that any business man will agree that, regarded purely from the point of view of publicity or advertising, the value obtained by the British Government must have been at least tenfold in excess of the quite small sum referred to in the Committee's Report.

Then there is also another item of the activity of the Department which has fallen under adverse comment by the right hon. Member for Rushcliffe, and that is the cinema work. With his inimitable vein of humour he entertained the House to a burlesque description of some film which he suggested was hardly calculated to have any persuasive effect upon the intellects of the people of this country. I think the right hon. Gentleman will be interested if I tell him the facts, as I am informed, in regard to the cinema activities. They may explain—I do not think they will explain—the somewhat elemental humour—

Mr. S. MacNEILL Some of us are anxious for the hon. and learned Member to clear up a point. He said that he came here to-day without knowing anything about the subject under discussion. Would he tell us by what miraculous agency, information, or otherwise, he is now so well informed and so well briefed?

Mr. McCURDY I thought I had stated quite plainly. I said I came to this House not knowing what was the subject-matter of discussion, and I went to the ordinary channels, the representatives of the Ministry—

Mr. SNOWDEN Who are they?

Mr. MacNEILL Who told you? Give us the names. There is no harm in it.

6.0 P.M.

Mr. McCURDY I remember that on an occasion some time ago when in a similar way questions were put as to the name of the representative of a Ministry, and when his name was given what seemed to us a very unfair personal use was made of it. Therefore I feel a little diffident in giving names. The representatives of the Ministry are here. What their personal names may be is not of great importance to me. If hon. Members desire the names they have only to put down a question. May I continue to give what I understood the House desires to know? I am informed that the cinema activities of the Department were originally intended for Russia, but upon the unfortunate collapse of Russia the cinema activities were transferred to another country. The hon. Member for North-West Lanark (Mr. Pringle) delivered a speech in the course of which he made a number of remarkable allegations. He has alleged that the officials of the Ministry take advantage of their position in order to transmit to Colonial papers matter intended to have, so far as it is propagandist at all, only a purely domestic propaganda value. It is stated that some persons in the Ministry utilise their position in order to insert paragraphs affecting the fortunes of political parties in this House, and having no reference to the conduct of the War. It is stated that members of the Ministry use their position to bring compulsion to bear upon London editors, to exercise their position in some way which the hon. Member did not explain and for some improper purpose which he did not define. It is stated that the Ministry employs persons destitute either of honour or morality whose functions are those of inciting to strikes, and to things which are worse than strikes, the leaders of labour in this country. I am sure I shall have the sympathy of the hon. and learned Member (Mr. Swift MacNeill) when I say that charges of this kind ought not to be made on the floor of this House any more than they ought to be made outside this House without some shred of particulars being given which would lead us to suppose that there was a tittle of justification and a tittle of excuse for making allegations which are so vague as to leave no ripple of disturbance on the balanced intelligence of any person in this Chamber, but, nevertheless, are calculated to raise an atmosphere of grave suspicion among the public outside. I assure my hon. Friends opposite that, although my thirst for information may have been unusual on the part of a Member of this House, the circumstances which have led me to inform myself on this matter are as I have said. I have no knowledge whatever as to whether there is, or can be, any tissue or particle of justification for the grossly defamatory allegations which the hon. Member for North-West Lanark has thought right and proper to make. But for my own part I protest that even though the Government be the present Government, even though the Department be the Ministry of Information, even though the Minister be Lord Beaverbrook, there ought to be some sense of fairplay and some sense of decency before charges of this sort, without one tittle of evidence being adduced in support of them, are bandied so loosely across the floor of the House.

Major PEEL I should not have presumed to have intervened in this Debate had it not been that in days prior to the War I paid some considerable attention to this issue in its broader aspects and also that since the outbreak of the War I have followed some of its developments on the scene of various operations. I was, therefore, naturally greatly interested in hearing the speech of the hon. Baronet the Member for Bethnal Green (Sir M. Wilson), who carried, I think, his admiration for all things in Egypt a little too far in suggesting that we should spread the system of Egyptian darkness even over the deliberations of this House. I thought perhaps that there was something more in his suggestion that the best form of propaganda in that region was the Australian soldier, and it certainly strikes me as an easy way out of the difficulty that we should identify leaflets with banknotes. Now we are face to face at the very threshold of this question with an issue which has not been mentioned by any Member up to the present, that is, whether this Ministry of Information is to be a permanent Department or not. On the one hand, it may be entirely ephemeral, and just as this struggle has evoked it so it may pass away at its termination, or else we may be standing this afternoon at the start of a long sequence, the initiation of an important institution that has come to stay, so that when the order comes "Unfix bayonets!" we shall not unfix them.

Of these two opinions, I venture to hold the latter. If I may presume to do so I shall give one or two reasons for that opinion, which is founded on the permanent relationship between ourselves and Europe. If we look at the fifty years that elapsed between the Crimean War and the opening of this century, we shall see that during that period we adopted a policy of splendid isolation which was in fact no policy at all, and that we had adopted also an attitude somewhat of the superior person, of the lecturer to the countries of Europe. The consequence was that by the opening of this century we had incurred the hatred of the European Powers. I may recall the speech of Lord Rosebery in 1901 in which he said that there was no parallel to the hatred with which we were regarded. I may also recall the speech of Lord Salisbury in which he said that we had been the subject of hatred in every literature in Europe. The consequence was that we had to make an abrupt change in our policy. It was a change in three stages—the Japanese alliance, the French agreement, and the agreement with Russia. From that period we have had close relations with Europe which I venture to think will be strengthened by the present War. It follows from that that it may well be that some permanent institution of this nature is needed in order to give expression to the new needs of our policy. If that be so, then no scrutiny can be too careful, no examination can be too anxious, for this Ministry may become a permanent institution of this country and, if so, it will become the permanent vehicle of the voice of England to the world.

I pass over the early stages of the history of this Ministry. I should like to look for a few minutes at its machinery and the message it has to furnish to us during the present times and in the future. The period up to February, 1918, was certainly one of great confusion and chaos. The officials and officers overlapped and fought with each other in all quarters. But with the organisation of the office in February of this year a totally different scene presents itself. Now we all find very able and influential men at the head of affairs. This creates a new phase, a new situation with which we have to deal, and the situation is this—that according to the statement of the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in this House, and, as we all know, this Ministry is directly responsible to the War Cabinet. It is, therefore, independent so far, and the great risk now before us is that the very ability, influence, and energy of these eminent men may so far expand their forces that the Ministry of Information may speak with its own voice and then, perhaps, with the voice of the Foreign Office or the War Cabinet. I will not go so far as to suggest that there are three voices in these matters in the Government, but it is quite conceivable that there may be at least two. If that is so, I venture to say that we are up against a most serious position. Nothing can be more serious than a double voice in our foreign affairs. We have seen what disaster in the old days that caused to the Prince of the House of Bourbon. We have seen in our own hour what disaster it brought to the house of Romanoff, and what sinister results it has had upon the policy of the Hohenzollerns. Therefore, I would venture to ask whether we could not, in this matter, imitate somewhat our friends across the water, the United States.

When they were faced with a similar problem they organised their department of publicity on lines quite different from ourselves. At the head of the department is the Secretary of State, who corresponds with the right hon.

Gentleman the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Under him are the heads of the Army and Navy of the United States. Then, in the fourth place, there are some eminent civilians with whom are associated a number of journalists. It seems to me that that organisation has very great advantages. In the first place, you have at the head of it the man responsible for the foreign affairs of the country. Therefore you avoid entirely the risk of talking with two voices on foreign affairs. In the second place, you have at the disposal of this bureau or Ministry the permanent persons at the head of the Army and Navy. In the third place, you have an eminent man, such as some of those who are there already, and associated with him you have the men who must be far more qualified than anybody else to conduct the executive part of this work—I mean the journalists of the country.

There is another point which I would like to mention to the House. It seems to me of the very greatest importance that we should go step by step in this matter of propaganda with the Allies of this country. I have not heard it mentioned this afternoon in the House, but I think that it is of the very first importance that we should take no action in the matter of propaganda without close relationship with the Allies of this country. Therefore there are two things which I would venture to suggest to His Majesty's Government. One is that we should amend our Constitution in this matter somewhat on the lines of America, and also that we should keep closer communications with the Allies of this country. I have said a few words as to the machinery of this Ministry. I should like to say, also, a few words as regards its message. It seems to me that there can be no possibility of this Ministry fulfilling its proper function in the world, at any rate, until a clear message as to foreign policy is presented to it by the Government. If we look at our foreign policy for the Near East we see what constant and what marked changes there have been in that respect. Last year all were in favour of turning out the Turk from Constantinople. This year we say that he shall stay there so far as we are concerned. In Austria we have had, since 1917, three changes of policy. One has been aimed, more or less, at the present organisation of the Austrian Government as a whole. Early this year we favoured to some extent the opposite policy when we announced that we would make no change in the organisation of Austria as it stands to-day. Only within the last few weeks we have announced a much more drastic policy as regards Austria. These very sharp and rapid alterations seem to me to have caused great obstacles in the way of full and effective propaganda. Therefore, what I desire to observe in this connection is in the first place that we should realise we are face to face with something which is to be a permanent institution in this country; in the second place, that in every step that is taken we speak with a single voice, and in the third place, that we should realise that no propaganda in the Near East or in any other part can be effective unless the message is clear, consistent, and beyond doubt.

Colonel WEIGALL As a member of the Committee responsible for the Report we are discussing this afternoon, perhaps I may be allowed to say a word or two on its financial aspect. I have always wondered why my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Bethnal Green was given the nickname by which he is known throughout the Army, I thought it was because he scatters the charm of an exceptional personality over all and indiscriminate, but I find that he carries his prodigality still further, because in his speech this afternoon he proposes that it should be even carried so far as the realm of national finance. He returns to us after three years' absence as, indeed, a prodigal son, and I am sure after the speech we have heard he is equally welcome. He did say, though in jest, what appears to me to be a real wholesome truth. I have never spoken before on any of the Reports which the Select Committee on national expenditure has presented to this House. I hope and believe that these Reports have done real good in drawing the attention of the House to the necessity of an adequate and careful supervision by the House of national expenditure. But I do feel that if it is carried too far by way of detailed examination we may really do more harm than good. There is undoubtedly blame, which I propose to deal with later on, but, so far as the Department itself is concerned, it does appear to me to be a case where you must consider not only that you are dealing with human agencies, but that we are engaged in a world-wide war against an alert, intelligent, and unscrupulous Power. It is an extraordinary combination of the sublime and the ridiculous where you have got the highest ideals which you can only reach by means of the most murky material. You have got to descend to a low level in order to reach this highly imaginative ideal.

What the House must realise, however, is that it is work which has got to be done, although it is work which some of us would not like to do. If you are going to have propaganda and a Ministry of Information, it seems to me that so long as you can secure that the expenditure is being controlled, and that you have a proper system of accounts, the actual details of administration of a Department of this kind one ought not to inquire too closely into. There is another aspect. Information gathered from civilian sources, if it is properly used, must be of enormous value to our Allies in particular. You cannot divorce the activities of a Ministry of Information from the activities of your armed forces in the field, and, therefore, my first and main point is, by all means let us examine as carefully and closely as possible the system of financial control, though, personally, I think the less we discuss it in this House the better, but do not inquire too closely into all the details of what is done by the Department. Now I would like to deal with the question of where the blame lies. If I may give in summary form a question and answer at the end of a long examination of the Treasury official who explained to us the story of the system and accounts and financial administration, it might help the House to understand exactly what happened. He was asked: "Is it the fact that on Colonel Buchan receiving his appointment he attended a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee and having heard their deliberations he asked Mr. Honeyman, a chartered accountant, to prescribe a form of accounts; that form of accounts was neither confirmed nor discredited by the Treasury, and was put into force, remaining in force for some months, until Lord Beaverbrook found it necessary to engage Messrs. Deloitte, Griffiths and Company, to go into the affairs, which they did, issuing a strong report which suggested that the previous system of accounts should be scrapped and another system instituted in its place, as has now been done?" The answer to the whole of that question was "Yes." I agree it was a long question, but it was put in that way to save the time of the Members. It means that throughout the whole of these proceedings the Treasury did not prescribe the form of accounts or have any financial control of them, and this might have gone indefinitely, or at any rate up to the present day. The Treasury had no cognisance of it. The explanation, of course, is that they are understaffed. It is clear from the evidence before us that there were twenty-five systems of public accounts which they were in the habit of inspecting and reviewing. Only eighteen were examined, and one of the seven left over happened to be this brand new Department, starting out on a new field of finance with people who had no knowledge of Civil Service administration or of the form of accounts usually required by this House and its Committees. The lesson we have to draw is, that in this and every other new Department—and there are other Reports coming before the House to which my remarks apply—the House must see to it that a duly qualified accounting officer is appointed, that when he has been appointed he and he alone should be responsible for seeing that the system of accounts is maintained and never altered without Treasury sanction, and for being the real watchdog for this House without being in the way of a Department's work or putting sand in the wheel. He should exercise a real control, and the Treasury should so arrange its work that no Government Department goes on for more than six months without some form of control being exercised by it. The only blame that can be attached in connection with this Report is to the Treasury. A former speaker said that surely it was chopping rather small, straws to suggest all this financial control. When you are spending the enormous sums which we are now doing, unless you have some form of financial control which ensures to this House and to the country that you are having 20s. worth for every sovereign you spend, I feel it is a rather big straw indeed.

Mr. BALDWIN (Joint Financial Secretary to the Treasury). I knew when I was made aware of the subject of this Debate this afternoon that we should have a very interesting Debate, and I think it has been interesting. I think it is shown that it is quite time not only that we had a discussion on the Ministry of Information in this House, but that we had some information about the Ministry of Information. We ought to keep very clearly in mind when we talk about the Ministry of Information and about this Report on its expenditure, that the Report has hardly anything to do with the Ministry of Information which only came into existence on the 4th of March of this year. Not that it is not perfectly correct to bring up all the matters which are in this Report—I hope to deal with some of them—but I do wish to strike this note at the beginning of my remarks: That I hope the Ministry of Information, as constituted to-day and about which I hope to say something, is not going to be prejudiced in the minds of any Members of the House by incidents which occurred twelve months ago under a completely different state of things. I propose speaking first of all, quite briefly, on certain criticisms that have been made arising out of matters of fact. I do not wish to go in detail

into all these very old stories, which although they make very good newspaper paragraphs and although they may be records of mental aberration, do not really affect the work of the Ministry, which is really the important thing at the present moment. That unfortunate visit to Dublin, the account of which has appeared in nearly all the papers of the Kingdom, was an entertainment of a party of journalists from overseas who were exceedingly anxious to get some first-hand information about the conditions in Ireland. It was not being run in the interests of any party in this country. They went to Ireland, they saw—[An. HON. MEMBER: "And conquered!"]—they saw well-known members of every party in that country, but the gentleman who was in charge of the party, though efficient at his ordinary work, had never before taken charge of a party or tried to look after one. [Laughter.] I know it is an exceedingly humorous thing, but I want to state the facts of what happened. He was not fitted for the task, and the moment he came back he was taken to book for it and removed from that kind of work by the Ministry. I know the thing is very funny in one way, but I would point out that while a mistake was made the mistake was taken up, and it is not likely to happen again. I do not wish to go into any details as to what happened about the dinner. No complaint was made to me personally, and it is not brought under notice in this Paper, and I think, perhaps, there was an error of judgment. I do not think the case was a serious one, and I may say that the gentleman mainly responsible is no longer at the Ministry.

Mr. MacVEAGH What Government Department is he in now?

Mr. BALDWIN A case was alluded to in which reference was made to a Member of this House, but I think the House will be aware by this time that the hon. Member in question, just before this Report came out, assured me personally that he had no idea that there was anything irregular in paying this money. He expressed his readiness to refund, and I believe his request will be granted, and a refund will be made. I come to one or two matters of rather more importance. There is the employment of a firm of accountants, which has been touched upon by one or two Members. The real and obvious reason why the Ministry wished to employ a firm of accountants was that a man of business had been put into the post, to which he came for the first time, and where he was gathering up the threads that had hitherto been connected with the Department. He wanted to know exactly, and in as quick a time as possible, where the money was going, and he wanted to have that in a form that he could understand and in a way in which the knowledge could be obtained more quickly than through the medium hitherto employed. I must say for myself, as one with some knowledge of accounts, that it has taken me a very considerable time, in all the other work I have to do, to be able to follow them, and I have always much more time when I can get the accounts in the more familiar shape of a profit and loss account; then I know where I am. I do not think anyone who has any knowledge of business would criticise the action of the Minister in this matter. There is one point in the Report on which I believe there is some misapprehension in regard to the position of Sir Roderick Jones, who is both managing director of Reuter's and an official of the Ministry of Information. When the present Minister took up his office he appointed Sir Roderick Jones as chief of his Executive Committee, and Sir Roderick's connection with Reuter's has been severed. The Minister explained to me that Sir Roderick's services were invaluable to him, but that Sir Roderick had nothing to do with policy or finance; that the question of policy lies with the Ministry, and that where it is a question of policy it is controlled by Colonel Buchan, the right hon. Member for Accrington (Major Baker) and Mr. MacMillan, a very well known Scottish counsel. I may say the House will feel that to a body of that kind we may leave the matter with perfect confidence.

Sir F. BANBURY Do I understand my hon. Friend to say that Sir Roderick Jones, as managing director of Reuter's, has severed his connection with that agency?

Mr. BALDWIN For the time being.

Mr. S. MacNEILL For the time being!

Mr. KING Surely it was very recently.

Mr. BALDWIN I will anticipate what I was going to say later, that the existence of the Ministry of Information will be only for the duration of the War, and when the War comes to an end, the Ministry will also come to an end.

Major BOWDEN Do I understand the hon. Gentleman to say that Sir Roderick Jones is not pursuing his other business, and that he has severed his connection with it?

Mr. BALDWIN Certainly, and Sir Roderick Jones, like a great many more men, is working for the Government without pay. He is a man of sufficient means to work for nothing. I have seen articles in newspapers, and in one I respect as much as the "Westminster Gazette," one of the most fair-minded papers, on the position of this gentleman, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe was concerned because a number of people occupied positions in this Ministry of Information who were also in business. It is a very difficult question. When you are founding a new Department, or a new Ministry, you are between the devil and the deep sea. If you fill in with people who are Civil servants the cry goes up that the Department is filled with bureaucrats, and if you do not do that but appoint business men, then along come critics who say, "Look at him; he is surrounding himself with blackguards." If you have an efficient man of business, he is a blackguard. It is very difficult, therefore, to know what to do. With regard to these business men I have had a conversation with my right hon. Friend about the work of these business men, and I find that there is a great deal of misapprehension with regard to them. I rather think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Leif Jones) has visions of these men rushing from one capital of Europe to another, and trying to make contracts after the War for their own firms on more favourable terms. I am sure that nothing of that kind will happen. The controllers, or whatever the name may be that they have, will have nothing whatever to do with the policy of the propaganda in the various countries. They are appointed solely for this reason, to control the finance of the country which is being dealt with. Say, for example, that it has been agreed to have propaganda expenditure in all the countries of Europe for, say, a million pounds. The Minister in charge will have to see how far he can go, and how he can cut his cloth according to the various countries in which the work of propaganda is to be conducted. He might perhaps put down a moderate amount, say, £50,000, or £100,000, or whatever the sum might be, that is allocated, for expenditure on propaganda work in a particular country. It is of the very greatest importance that there should be someone with an intimate knowledge of the country in which the propaganda is to be carried on, and to consider how the proposed amount could be laid out to the best advantage. That is all these gentlemen have to do. They put their expert knowledge at the service of the Department as to how the greatest amount of service can be done for the smallest amount of expenditure.

Mr. JONES Do the representatives in the different countries have any voice in the direction of how much will be spent in those countries?

Mr. BALDWIN No. I think I will be able later to say something of interest on that point. The fact that these gentlemen are connected with business I know does cause prejudice among some Members, but the matter should be looked at in this way. A number of men are prepared to give their services for this kind of work, and they believe that they can be of very great use, and I do not think it is reasonable to expect that they should be cut off entirely from their own businesses. When a man takes office that is an entirely different thing.

Mr. S. MacNEILL Why was not Sir Roderick Jones allowed to retain his directorship when other directorships were retained? Why was he made a victim?

Mr. BALDWIN I pass to a further consideration of the facts. I must take exception on behalf of the Department which I represent to some of the criticism in this Report on their action. I do not think that in its very first clause, with all respect to my right hon. Friend, it is quite fair to say that the Treasury had no cognisance of the expenditure of these Departments. The Treasury had complete knowledge of the expenditure in connection with propaganda work, but hon. Members know quite well that in the earlier days, which are only referred to here, a good deal of the expenditure at that time came from sources over which we had no control, and which we were not in a position to discuss. By saying

we had no cognisance it looks as if we shut our eyes to it and had not seen it. I resent that, because it is not my custom to shut my eyes and not see these things. In the same way, I think it is a little misleading when, again, it is stated, in paragraph 10, that in many matters of importance Treasury sanction was not required. I do not quite understand that, or who made that statement, but I think that sometimes more is expected of the Treasury than the Treasury has either done in the past, or does in any ordinary practice, or can do at present. I know, for instance, that we have to rely very often on the audit department calling our attention to any irregularity that may have occurred in the way accounts are kept or in the way things are charged. It is not possible for the Treasury, and the Treasury has never done it, to go round itself in every Department and look out for faults. We have to have notice of these things brought to us, and sometimes, and especially in the case of new Ministries, a good many of which have been created during the War, they are apt to run away sometimes and go too fast, and it may be some time afterwards that our attention is called, too late, to expenditure that ought not to have been made, but which we really had no means of stopping through not being in a position to ascertain that it was being made at the time it was being made. I only feel sometimes that when the House of Commons, or, I should rather say, the outside public, read these Reports and see these constant references to the Treasury, people are very apt to draw a false conclusion and to feel that there is an implied censure on what I believe to be the most honourable and hard-working staff of public servants which we have in the whole service of this country.

Sir C. HENRY The hon. Gentleman made a rather important admission, and said he had no control over the expenditure of a Department until they were committed to that expenditure, but when a Ministry is formed, are not certain regulations laid down that they must get Treasury sanction to expenditure before they are committed to it? It is a very important point, because my hon. Friend conveyed the idea to me that until the expenditure was made, and the Treasury were thus cognisant of it, the Treasury had no weight or authority at all.

Mr. BALDWIN I was speaking rather of an exceptional case. What the hon. Baronet says is quite correct. We have control over salaries, with, of course, this limitation, with which hon. Members are perfectly familiar, that when a Department is created in a hurry, and you get a big business man put in to form a staff, it is a very difficult thing to get a man who is used to paying £2,000, £3,000, or £4,000 a year to think he can get the same services for £500 or £600 a year, and that is where a great deal of practical trouble has arisen, and I see no remedy for that at all. I wish to say one word only about criticisms that have been made on matters of fiction entirely, and I would touch on that as briefly as they deserve. There is no truth whatever in the report that the Ministry of Information is going to run a newspaper for soldiers, and there is no truth either in the statement that they are going to control the war correspondents.

Mr. JONES Can the hon. Gentleman say that they do not wish to do so?

Mr. BALDWIN I am never able to say what may be in a man's mind. I can only deal with the facts. The last point which was made was by the hon. Member for North-West Lanark (Mr. Pringle), whom I do not now see in his place; but I wish to say that there is not a syllable of truth in what he said about the Ministry of Information employing spies, or doing any work of that kind, to foment disorder and distrust among the working classes of this country, that nothing of the kind has been done or is contemplated or will be done, that I regret exceedingly that he made any insinuations of the kind, and that I cannot imagine any statement more calculated to cause unrest and trouble where unrest and trouble may be likely to arise. I regret very much that he allowed himself to make those statements. I must say a few words about what has been done with regard to the present Ministry and the controlling of its finances. I have been speaking mostly, so far, about the past, and I wish to speak now about the present. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe put very clearly before the House the various bodies that existed before the Ministry of Information was created and which were drawn up into the Ministry. The Ministry started on 4th March of this year, and we have succeeded in raising the financial basis of the Ministry on these lines. We are in process of formulating, and I may say we have practically agreed upon, a total figure for the Estimates for the year's working of the Ministry. Of course, that has been a lengthy and troublesome business. It is no easy matter for the Minister in a new Ministry, pulling together the various Departmental bodies, to decide how much he can get his expenditure down to. I think a figure will be

agreed which for the purpose will not be extravagant. All specific proposals come to the Treasury for sanction, and there is an accounting officer there. One of our first-class clerks goes twice a week to the Ministry, spending two or three hours each time in the afternoon, and discussing matters connected with salaries and any other matters of interest concerning expenditure that they care to discuss with him, and this serves two purposes. It secures a very close control, and it expedites decisions, both of which things are to the good. We have some time ago made a request to the Ministry, which I expect will be agreed to, that they should submit to us a monthly statement of their accounts, in order that we may see how the money is going.

Sir F. BANBURY This is all new, I understand?

Mr. BALDWIN Well, it is a matter, I should think, of the last three months. We have haggling over these details. The clerk has been going there for some time, and he has visited the Ministry, I think, since its formation, and used to go every week, I believe, last winter.

Mr. S. MacNEILL Is the gentleman Mr. Thomas?

Mr. BALDWIN No, he is not employed at the Treasury.

Mr. T. WILSON I think it can only be for a very short time that an accounting officer has been going from the Treasury to the Ministry of Information.

Mr. BALDWIN He is not an accounting officer. He is one of our clerks, and he has been going for some time twice a week, and at less frequent intervals before that—about once a week. I am quite hopeful that with these financial arrangements we shall exercise a very substantial control over the Ministry of Information, and I wish to pass on from that to say a few words to the House about the Ministry itself. Propaganda is not a word that has a pleasant sound in English ears. We suffered undoubtedly in the earliest days of the War by leaving propaganda as largely as we did to our enemies. The Englishman dislikes talking about himself, and he dislikes advertising what he has done. If in England you say a man is a self-advertiser, it is looked upon as one of the unkindest things you can say about him. But the time had come when the world at large had not appreciated what these Islands had done in the War, and it was found in one country after another that the cause of the Allies was suffering owing to the ignorance that was displayed about what had been done in Great Britain, and owing to that ignorance it was an easy matter for the propaganda of our enemies to take hold. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Rushcliffe said he could not see the need now for propaganda, because everyone was in the War, but I think he forgets for the moment that the only chance the German has of winning this War is to split the Allies, and that he can only split them by propaganda. There is no more dangerous propaganda than that, and none that there is more immediate necessity to counter. It is quite impossible to say much on that subject in this House, but one or two things I think I may say, because I think they will be common knowledge to Members who have been on the other side of the water. For some time, and in no too distant a part, there was a strong belief in parts of France among our Allies that we were not doing our share in the War.

Mr. CHANCELLOR Lord Northcliffe told them that!

7.0 P.M.

Mr. BALDWIN The belief was found there, and the belief had to be countered. In Italy propaganda was making headway on such lines as would be most destructive to the union of the Allies in that country. There is another aspect of this question which I wish to put before the House. Public opinion to-day has far greater weight in the moulding of Governments and of policy in various countries than it ever had before, and unless people have faith in their Allies and have faith in their cause, it is impossible for them to hold together until the end. Nothing could be more important than that the Dominions should know what is being done by this country, and that they should also know in the United States what is being done here. Members who have seen that beautiful photographic collection now being exhibited at

Prince's Gallery will recognise that propaganda, as done by an exhibition of that kind, will have nothing but an elevating effect, and could not fail to do, what the most fastidious propagandist in this House will desire that it should do. Then, again, another form of propaganda is to spread about in neutral countries and among our Allies the story that this country is being starved, and will be unable to carry on the fight on that account. One of our duties is to nail lies like that to the counter whenever they are circulated. We have proof that the work being done by the Ministry of Information is being well appreciated now, because, during the summer, there have been articles in some of the German papers to the effect that admirable work is being done now by English propaganda and suggesting that the Germans should organise themselves as efficiently. Let me remind the House that, although we have not exactly the figures as to what Germany has spent on propaganda, we do know what she has spent in some cases, and we can form a conjecture of what she has spent in other cases. We believe we are well within the mark in saying that the expenditure of our Ministry of Information has not been more than one-seventh or one-eighth per annum of the expenditure of Germany on this service in each year since the War began. I wish I could say something about the way in which propaganda work is divided up inside the Ministry. The right hon. Member for the Tyneside Division (Mr. J. M. Robertson), very naturally and very rightly, was curious to have some information on that point.

I have felt great difficulty in discussing this subject on the floor of the House of Commons for this reason, that when I came to look into these matters, knowing that I should have to speak on this occasion, I discovered that, after all, this propaganda work is very like anti-submarine work: it is work which is necessary, it is work as to which you cannot disclose to your adversaries how you are doing it, and it is work that can be and must be judged by results. I did ask my right hon. Friend the Minister of Information if it would not be possible for him to meet Members of this House in the way the Minister for Food and other Ministers have done and have a perfectly frank discussion, when things can be said which could not be said if there were any risk of their getting into the Press of our opponents. He at once, as I anticipated, expressed himself as very pleased at the idea, and if hon. Members desire such a meeting, I hope they will let me know, and possibly one can be arranged which would be of great interest and fruitful of good results. Before I sit down, I want to make one last statement. I know quite well there have been some very bitter attacks made on the Minister of Information, and I think it probable that many bitter attacks will be made in the future. I do not think it requires very much imagination to see along which lines those attacks will be made. But I think it only fair to say this: The Minister of Information is a man of very strong personality. Men with strong personalities have this in common, that the magnetism which comes with that personality either attracts or repels. I remember before the War there were Ministers in this House who had that kind of personality. I, myself, was conscious that in cases where the personality repelled the judgment was apt to be warped. I want to say this in all seriousness. Lord Beaverbrook has taken on a most difficult, delicate and thankless task. Do not let his pitch be queered. Give him a fair chance and judge him by results. Do let us, in time of war, pull together to this extent, that we do not allow the personality of an individual to warp our judgment as to the value of the work he is doing or the means he employs in doing it. I hope the House will not think I have said more than I ought to on that subject. I do feel this very strongly. Lord Beaverbrook is not an intimate friend of mine, and therefore I can speak with perfect freedom in this matter. Knowing well as I do, mixing as I do with Members in every quarter of this House, I am aware that there is some feeling of prejudice existing, and all I ask is that hon. Members should judge fairly by results, and by what is done, and not let that feeling of prejudice warp their judgment.

Mr. S. MacNEILL I desire to say a very few words on this matter. I am glad the Chancellor of the Exchequer is here, as I wish to put a few questions to him. I have always admired the Foreign Secretary for the adroit way in which he has got out of difficulties when conundrums have been addressed to him. Let me give the reasons why I object to this Ministry. First, because it has not been created by Statute; secondly, it is the twenty-fifth Ministry which has been started since the War began, and its personnel consists largely of people who are not Members of this House and not responsible to this House. I object to it likewise because, to use the words of Mr. Lecky in regard to another transaction, the trial of finance is permeating the whole institution. If anyone who did not know the facts were looking at this Ministry for the first time they would say, "What is this but a sty of guinea pigs." Let me now put my

conundrum to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The right hon. Gentleman knows my opinion about Ministers holding directorships, and he himself has shown how desirous he is that everything should be above board in public life, because he resigned his directorships even when he was not in office. He knows very well the struggle we have had on this question, a struggle extending over fifteen years. Mr. Gladstone approved of the principle, but did not insist very strenuously. Still, we have since established the principle, and it is a rule that no Minister of the Crown shall be a company director; that the two positions are incompatible when united together. But how does that operate in this Ministry? Not only is he the head of the Ministry, but his immediate subordinates are either secretaries or directors of public companies. I put the question, are these gentlemen Ministers of the Crown? If they are, then there is a total rupture of the constitutional principle in any one of them holding a company directorate. Are they Civil servants? If they are, then there is a rule of the Civil Service prohibiting Civil servants or anyone in the Civil Service holding a company directorship of any kind. This afternoon my hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Mr. King), who appears to be an incarnate interrogator, managed to convey to the House information while asking a question. He inquired whether four members of this staff did not divide among themselves fifty-four company directorships. The right hon. Gentleman could not deny it. In the least glorious period of Lord Salisbury's administration forty-one directorships were divided among forty-four Ministers, whereas in this case four members of this unique institution, whether they are salaried or not I do not care, have fifteen more directorships among them than were possessed by Lord Salisbury's administration at the time when I began the agitation against ministerial guinea pigs on that bench. That is a very serious and not very pleasant reflection. The Secretary to the Treasury has made an extremely interesting, candid, and honest speech. He was perfectly candid. He admitted that one of these gentlemen was a director of Reuter's, and that it was a fact that since this Ministry was established £126,000 has been expended in telegrams, most of which were sent by Reuter's. The right hon. Gentleman cannot get out of it by saying that Sir Roderick Jones is no longer a director of Reuter's. The relationship between himself and his company remains, and ought to remain. It is not in the slightest degree dishonest—it would be quite unnatural if it were otherwise—but he is as much interested in his company, at least, as he is in the public cause of this newly-instituted administration. Why should that which would not be permitted in a Minister of the Crown under ordinary circumstances be permitted under Lord Beaverbrook's administration? I know no answer to that. There is another conundrum which affects the Treasury very much. This is a most incriminating document which I have amused myself all the afternoon by reading. It is far more witty than "Punch," because it is unconsciously witty. Paragraph 15 says "The Accounting Officer of the Ministry, Mr. W. E. Stavert." In paragraph 9 it is stated that Mr. Stavert is late director of the Bank of Montreal. Of that bank Lord Beaverbrook was chairman.

Mr. BALDWIN It was not the Bank of Montreal.

Mr. MacNEILL Then another bank?

Mr. BALDWIN Yes.

Mr. MacNEILL Then they are both banking men. They can sing together that ditty of Shakespeare, "I know a bank." Let us see his position. He is an outsider. It is ostentatiously said he takes no salary, but, according to this Report, he controls a permanent Civil servant. A Civil servant is controlled by Mr. Stavert, who is not controlled by anyone except Lord Beaverbrook, who is not controlled by anyone because Lord Beaverbrook has no salary, nor has Mr. Stavert. Referring to Mr. Gale Thomas, paragraph 9 of the Report says "He is a permanent Civil servant who was on the staff of the Charity Commission... He also acted virtually as secretary, there being no such official in the Department. Mr. Thomas is now responsible to Mr. Stavert." Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer explain to an ignorant man like myself—a "mere child of finance," as the Foreign Secretary once said of himself—how it is that a permanent official comes to be responsible to a gentleman who is not responsible to Parliament, but is only responsible to Lord Beaverbrook, who has no salary?

Mr. BONAR LAW Who informed the hon. Gentleman that Lord Beaverbrook has no salary?

Mr. MacNEILL I am glad that he is not an honorary man, and that, although he has no portfolio, he has still a purse. [An HON. MEMBER: "He has a portfolio!"] Yes. I beg pardon; he has. I am delighted that he should have some share in the £210,000 which annually the Ministers themselves arrange for their valuable services in public life. So Lord Beaverbrook is responsible to someone! I am very glad of it. My hon. Friend opposite insinuated that some of this money, which is as secret as the Secret Service Fund, of which there are no details given to us, may be expended in secret service, and then there came a wonderful example of the outraged purity of English public life. One hon. Member was almost moved to tears. The idea of Secret Service is impossible—how could it be? Let us look at this incriminating document. The first paragraph says "There was also a Bureau managed by Mr. Mair—" who arranges cinemas for the impossible task of the League of Nations and Imperial Preference—"through the Home Office out of an Emergency Vote, which we were informed was drawn from the Secret Service Vote." Therefore this institution in its earlier stages has been supported out of the Secret Service Fund. What is to prevent a very large sum coming out of the Secret Service Vote? I must very strongly oppose it. I regard this institution as completely subversive of all the ordinary constitutional usages, and of the relations which can exist between a Minister of the Crown and the House of Commons, and as introducing, by the great number of unpaid Ministers, a principle which keeps Ministers out of the control of the House of Commons; above all, by making an inroad on the public purse without submitting the money which is to be expended or voted to the scrutiny of the House of Commons, and without any adequate knowledge of how it is to be dealt with. The Ministers have grown to an enormous extent. They now number 105. In Lord Salisbury's Administration, in what I may call its worst days, they only numbered forty-four. In Pitt's time there were only seven real Ministers. We have now 105, and we have for the first time since Walpole a regular brigade of salaried Members of the House of Commons—namely, 288. [An HON. MEMBER: "670!"] I would not go as far as that, because there are some righteous men here. But every third Member of this House of Commons is either a place-man or a pensioner. Look at the suffering going on abroad, and then see Gentlemen ladling out public money for their own advantage! When we read of £31 being spent in two days in drinks and £5 in cigars, how outrageous is this rationing system for the poor! We must stop this kind of thing. I believe this new administration is both useless and mischievous, and is a sign of the mammonised character of the times and of this administration.

Mr. RONALD McNEILL I cannot help thinking my hon. Friend who has just sat down has allowed himself to fall into an unduly pessimistic frame of mind. It may be that we have been steadily rolling down hill from the time of Pitt and Walpole, but I do not think that those matters have any close bearing on the particular matters now under discussion. I want to turn to the speech of my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to say I am very glad he made clear one particular point—that the House of Commons ought not to regard, as it is sometimes too apt to regard, the Report of a Select Committee, which has been supplied both to the Press and this House for criticism, as a sort of infallible exposition. After all, the Select Committee is just as much open to criticism as the Government, and it may be that the criticisms they make are well-founded or are ill-founded. This is the sixth Report this Select Committee has issued, and I do not know I have ever been in a position to speak with any personal knowledge of any of the matters they have discussed until this one. I do happen to have a certain amount of personal knowledge on one or two points dealt with in this Report as to which, in my judgment, the Report is wrong. I think, to begin with, it is very vague, and I think on one point, with which I will deal in a moment, it is wrong. The Financial Secretary has already called attention to a sentence in paragraph 10 of the Report, which says "It was stated, however, that in many matters of importance Treasury sanction is not required." It does not say in what matters, and we are not told whether the Committee did or did not accept that evidence. All we are told is that "It was stated." It is of no interest or importance to know whether that was stated or not. What is of interest and importance is to know whether the Committee came to the conclusion or not that it was well-founded. My hon. Friend has spoken about the expenditure, of which we have heard so much, of £31 on entertainment. After the explanation that has been given by the Government I must say I am very much surprised that the Select Committee should have thought it worth while to put in their Report a paltry matter of that sort; and, if they did think it necessary to put it in, I am very much surprised that they did not think it right to add, as we have now heard from the Government, that the person concerned has been relieved of his duties in connection with the Ministry. I come to the point in the Report which I say I believe is wrong. We are told that the criticism contained

in this Report goes back before the existing condition of things—before the Ministry. In paragraph 3 we are told of an investigation that was made by Mr. Donald, and the impression has been conveyed, I think, by the Report, and certainly by the comments in the Press, that the investigation made by Mr. Donald resulted in a very damaging criticism of Colonel Buchan, who at that time was directing this branch of the Ministry. It happened that I was in a position at the time to see Mr. Donald's Report, and to see the reply that was made to it by Colonel Buchan, and I had some knowledge of what was going on. I think myself that it is most unfair to put in here that "Mr. Donald further stated that his inquiry into the publishing and book buying system—" and so forth, and that "The method of circulating information by the Press or otherwise was also criticised, many of the articles having little interest and less value as propaganda." There again the whole importance lies in whether or not this is good or bad criticism. We are merely told by the Select Committee that this was the result of Mr. Donald's Report. I do not know whether or not it is correct that this was the result of his Report; but certainly, so far as I am able to form a judgment upon the matter, I think that Mr. Donald's Report was an extremely superficial one, that it was far too hastily arrived at, and most unjust in the criticism which was levelled upon the work that had been done by Colonel Buchan. The Select Committee ought either to have said nothing whatever about Mr. Donald's Report or ought to have gone a good deal further and made themselves responsible for deciding between these two experts—because they were both experts—and say which of the two were right.

Sir F. BANBURY There is something in the Report!

Mr. McNEILL It says that the Committee "are of opinion that there was considerable foundation for their criticisms, especially in regard to the lack of financial control and wasteful expenditure." I am not expressing any opinion about the financial control. Of that I know nothing. What I am concerned about is the value of the propaganda work, and I think that the work done at that time by Colonel Buchan was extremely valuable. I do not believe it is true that the method of circulating information was really open to serious criticism, and I entirely disagree with the statement that many articles had little interest and less value as propaganda. I should like to know whether the members of the Select Committee ever took the trouble to go into the matter for themselves, or whether they were content with the ipsi dixit of Mr. Donald? I do not know whether the judgment of the members of the Select Committee would have been of much value if they had gone into the matter; perhaps it would not have been of very great value.

Mr. JONES The hon. Gentleman must know that many of these leaflets were destroyed by the Ministry, and that they were discovered in great quantities.

Mr. McNEILL That may be, but the right hon. Gentleman does not suppose that because they may have destroyed many or most of the leaflets that copies could not have been found, and that he could not have had the opportunity of reading every leaflet that ever was printed if he had had the industry to do so? I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman would claim that his opinion in this matter would be of great value? I do not know. But I do know, from my own knowledge, that there were people at this time when this criticism was made who, I will not say specially examined every leaflet and every pamphlet that was written, but who did make a very fair examination of the literature really issued by the Department, and they certainly would not have endorsed the criticism made by Mr. Donald that Colonel Buchan was turning out stuff which was practically valueless for the purposes of propaganda.

Before I finish I want to say a word or two about propaganda itself. I was most astonished to hear the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. L. Jones) say in the course of his speech that the German propaganda throughout the War had not scored. I strongly disagree from that. What undoubtedly is true is that the ideas and psychology of the Germans told against them with all decent people all over the world. That is undoubtedly true. If their ideas, their ideals, and their methods had been cleaner and nobler than they were, no doubt their propaganda would have had infinitely greater effect. The wonderful thing is that it had so much effect when the subject-matter with which it had to deal was in itself so bad. I entirely agree with what was said by the hon. Member earlier in the Debate, that it was propaganda probably more than any other single fact or factor which brought about the disaster in Russia. However that may be, I do not

know anyone who has examined the facts of the disaster on the Isonzo earlier in the year but can doubt that that overthrow of the Italian Army was almost entirely due to the extraordinarily successful propaganda which had been at that time pursued by the Germans and the Austrians. I go further—and I point this with my own knowledge—though I have some facts which I should not like to disclose—but I can certainly say this, that the opposite is also true, that the great failure which the Austrians have more recently experienced when they had to recross the Piave was almost, or very largely, due to propaganda on our part. Whether it was due to the propaganda for which this Ministry was responsible or not I am not in a position to say—I rather think it was not. I rather think that propaganda was the work of an independent committee. As to the effect I have no manner of doubt. My hon. Friend was very sceptical. I think I could give him some facts bearing on that point which would convince him. I have, therefore, no doubt whatever as to the value of propaganda—if it is well carried out. Whether we get value for the money we have expended is, of course, an entirely different matter. I have not got the knowledge of the financial element of this Ministry, nor would I be competent to express an opinion of any value upon that point; therefore, I will not attempt to do so. Provided, however, that the finance is moderately well managed, I have not the slightest doubt that the money is well expended and the result very well worth having.

I was surprised to hear objection from the right hon. Gentleman because the cinema was used for propaganda purposes. It seemed to him entirely beneath the dignity of this country. He appeared to resent the idea that such a beggarly thing as a film should become "betwixt the wind and his nobility." In these days you have to take advantage of all the various forms of disseminating information which are known to the public and are valued by them. Recently we have had articles written, speeches made, and sermons delivered as to how the best use can be made of the picture palace for increasing its value for educational purposes, lecture-room purposes, and in other directions. It seems desirable to take every means we can, new or old, to put our views in this world war before the nations, and in the vivid form of the cinema we can not only tell our views, but what deeds have been done. That being so, I think it is extraordinary that this modern up-to-date educational engine, the cinema, should be so spoken scornfully of. The cinema should be used by us as far as we possibly can use it. My Noble Friend (Lord Beaverbrook) is endeavouring to use the cinema as much as he can in, I believe, all parts of the world, and I have not the slightest doubt that it is a very valuable means of propaganda. I believe that the money expended is one of the most valuable expenditures that has been undertaken.

Mr. T. M. HEALY I desire to address the House on a different subject to that which has preceded, and to ask the Government who is responsible for the anti-Irish propaganda? The Select Committee has inquired into the propaganda conducted by the Minister of Information, but no inquiry has been conducted into the Department of the Irish Office, which is responsible for spreading lies about our country and about a number of Members of this House. It is very significant that the Government should set down this subject as the one that alone was to be discussed upon the Consolidated Fund Bill. It was a very clever method, no doubt, to prevent the discussion of more burning topics, especially when there is only £1,500,000 involved in this Vote, while the Budget, during the War, is for something like thousands of millions. The hon. Gentleman who has just sat down has made a very spirited defence of the Department that the Member for Trinity College conducted for so many months up to his resignation in January last.

Mr. R. McNEILL My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Trinity College was never director of this Department at all. What happened was that my right hon. and learned Friend at that time was a member of the War Cabinet, and was asked by the War Cabinet to look into the various Departments and see what they were doing with a view to co-ordination. He himself never was in control.

Mr. JONES The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. The right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Trinity College was placed in charge of the Department by the War Cabinet, which was definitely assigned him because he was a man of comparative leisure in the War Cabinet, and—

Mr. SPEAKER One interruption leads to another, as in this case, and we get carried out of the course of the Debate.

Mr. HEALY It is very difficult to know what to believe, but this Report suggests, I think, quite clearly that the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Trinity College was responsible for this Department. The result is that this Department, I believe, is staffed and stuffed with the friends of the Member for Trinity College. The hon. Gentleman (Mr. R. McNeill) boasts that he is in possession of information which he cannot give to the House. It is something to be able to make that statement. Others are not in that fortunate position. That is why I wish to recall the House to the fact that the first person to call attention to the existence of the extraordinary descent of an ex-British soldier on a distant part of the coast in Ireland was either the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Trinity College or the hon. Gentleman, and to assert—which was asserted thereupon—and this is what I want to ask about—that this man, who has just been convicted, had documents upon him which implicated Mr. De Valera and which justified the arrest and deportation of over 100 Irish gentlemen, five or six of whom are Members of this House, and the whole of whom, if the Irish constituencies have their wish, will be Members of the House in three or four months' time. This raises a very serious question, the question of propaganda, because there was immediately issued by Reuter this statement—I do not believe for a moment that this was issued by Lord Beaverbrook's Department: in fact, I have taken the trouble to ascertain that it was not. It says, "An important feature in every plan—" that is the plan which was supposed to be captured on this suspected man—"was the establishment of a submarine base in Ireland to menace the shipping of all nations." It was said that this man was in possession of documents which warranted the arrest which took place soon after he was captured. All this information has been sent out to America. I want to know from the Government which of their officials in the Irish Office is responsible for these-untruths, because it was proved at the trial of this man the other day that not a single document was captured upon him, not even a single scrap of paper, and yet upon the face of that story over ninety persons occupying important positions in Ireland have been arrested and are still detained in custody. As we are within a few months of the General Election I want to put to the Government a plain and simple question. Will it be to the credit of British honour or British fame or the British good name that the result of the General Election in Ireland, whenever it comes, should be to sweep away the old constitutional party which existed for the last half century, and the election as a protest against their conduct of these interned persons whom you are keeping confined in various gaols up and down the country?

I want to know if the Government realise in advance, when conducting such a propaganda, the effect it will have on neutral countries and in America—do they realise the effect in those countries when some seventy or eighty seats in this House will be filled by men from British gaols. To my mind the effect of their policy on the country that started a war in defence of small nations will be shocking. The Government must be well aware that it is the policy which they are pursuing which is leading and which will lead to this state of things. I have long been opposed to many of the hon. Gentlemen behind me, but that does not make me rejoice at the destruction of the constitutional party and the constitutional movement. I affirm that it is this system which you started, which I have proved is unjustified, that is responsible. Who started that falsehood? What likelihood was there that the man from a German submarine who had been interned in Germany as a prisoner and who had been in the British Army for ten years would have documents upon him implicating the men who have been arrested?

I did not rise for the purpose of any recrimination at the present time, because my feelings are too serious and sad and sore upon this question. You have stated again and again that you have documents proving and warranting the justification of the arrest of these men. Up to the time this prisoner in the Tower was tried, I understand that there was some dark mystery which had to be probed and fathomed. The first sign of light which I saw as to the possession of documents by the Government was that I read that the Chief Secretary had produced as proof of their guilt a certain document, which was treated as being something fresh, whereas, as a matter of fact, it was a document which existed in the time of his predecessors, and, in fact, existed before the rebellion of Easter week, 1916. I believe all the other documents which have been referred to stand upon a similar basis. You have had a Select Committee to inquire into the working of the Ministry of Information, and why not have a Select Committee to inquire into the work of the Ministry of Information in Ireland? For my part, I should be willing that that Select Committee should consist of the rankest Tories in this House, and I should be willing that it should consist solely of English or Scottish Members, and

a Committee from which all Irish Members should be excluded. Surely you can trust your own Committee? They could hold their meetings in secret, they could sit upstairs, and let the Chief Secretary for Ireland or the Attorney-General for Ireland appear before them and say: "These are the proofs of the treasonable guilt of these eighty or ninety men." What is to stop them?

What is the alternative? That the Irish people will, as a protest, undoubtedly eject the constitutional representatives who now sit on these benches, and return prisoners as representatives of Ireland. Is this any wonder when proved falsehoods are detailed to the Irish people, and are telegraphed to America as proof warranting these arrests? When this mysterious stranger, Dowling, was about to be tried, I read that a question was put to the Chief Secretary in this House and he was asked if the trial would be in public or in private, and he replied that part of it would be in private. As a matter of fact, it was all held in public, and there was not a tittle of evidence given against this man to connect him with any Irish propaganda or Irish politicians, however extreme, and yet it is upon the case of what is called "the man in the Tower," the Blue Beard of British politics, that the arrest of these eighty or ninety men has taken place. Of course, English Members are so full of the War that it seems to them a matter of small moment that some eighty or ninety men, some of whom are their own colleagues, should be arrested and detained in prison without trial. That was not the olden spirit of this House, and when this House can occupy its time for four hours this afternoon on the expenditure upon cinemas and an expenditure of £31 on drinks for American journalists, and £5 for cigars, I hope it is not too much to ask that the fate of some eighty or ninety men whom you have detained without trial since the 17th May last, together with their families, may be called attention to.

You are getting up a recruiting campaign in Ireland. How are you facilitating it? What is the great military case which has occupied the thought and attention of the Irish people? It is the case of Captain Coulthurst. You object to crime and outrage, but at the same time you put a murderer on half pay and yet you expect the Irish people and juries to convict for murder when they see that military murderers are put on half pay. What do you do to the wife of one of these murdered men? Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington comes from America and she is detained at Liverpool, and she is not to be allowed to go back to her own country. She is the wife of the man you have murdered as ascertained by a Royal Commission. You have put the murderer on half pay and released him from Broadmoor. You have only got to state these things, and compare their gravity with frivolous talk about propaganda and the £31 for drinks and the £5 for cigars, yet you take up an afternoon debating it, do you suppose that the other facts I have stated do not make a very terrible propaganda against you? What is your answer today? If you had said these men were a danger to the State it might have been different, but that is not the case you made. The Irish Secretary was only five days in Ireland when he found the plot out which Mr. Duke, a lawyer as able as he, had been eighteen months in the country and had never discovered, and even Lord Wimborne, the Lord Lieutenant, says there is not a word of truth in the story. When cases of this kind arise, surely we are entitled to ask, when the question of the Ministry of Information is being debated, what is the position there before we go to a General Election in Ireland?

8.0 P.M.

Lastly, a document has been universally circulated dealing with the case of prison treatment; and I never read such a document. It is the most appalling statement on oath as an indictment of prison treatment that I ever read. I remember in 1870, when O'Donovan Rossa was in gaol, the "Spectator" published an article protesting against this man being manacled with his hands behind him for twenty-four hours, "exposed to the meanest insect that crawls." What is the case of these Belfast prisoners? Mind you, loyalty is expected and demanded as a right when statements like this are allowed to go uncontradicted. Your only reply to them is to arrest a little boy of twelve who distributed the affidavit! What is the case? First, you removed the prisoners from Dublin so that they should not have the consolation of visits from their friends. You took them to Belfast, where there was an English governor, and the suggestion is that this was done because an English governor would be more harsh than the governor of one of the Southern prisons. The affidavit which the Government have allowed to be circulated, or at least which they cannot prevent from being circulated, has reached countries where it is calculated to do endless mischief, because it deals with a matter affecting

the administration of religion, which, if true, will leave an indelible stain upon British rule in Ireland. I do not know if the chaplain of the prison in Belfast corroborates this statement. What is the story? According to the affidavit—I only give a summary of it as sworn—you had ninety men there, and, as I understand, they were not at that time receiving very harsh treatment. There was some question of ventilation. According to the affidavit, the prisoners insisted on opening their windows, and, when they were shut against them, they broke the windows, whereupon the governor said that if they would desist from this irregularity there would be no further closing down of the windows. The affidavit then proceeds to say that that night, although the governor's orders were obeyed, the prisoners were set upon by the police, forcibly manacled with their hands behind their backs, and while they had their hands behind their backs they were beaten and batoned about the head. The governor, not satisfied with that indignity, ordered the hose-pipe to be turned on them. Then, in their wet and miserable plight, they were dragged down to basement cellars, and, manacled as they were, left there for the night.

That is bad enough. The Saturday was the Catholic holiday, and they had to go to mass. Saturday is the day that the prisoners go to confession to prepare for communion the next day. According to the affidavit, no chance had been given to these men by the release of their hands for any of the purposes of nature. In this terrible condition of filth and stench ninety Catholic prisoners had to go to God's altar. That will go to Rome against you. You talk about propaganda. The Catholic chaplain at Belfast has not contradicted that statement. The idea that ninety prisoners, after being manacled for days, having to approach God's table in a terrible state of filth calls up to the Catholic as dreadful a picture as any that can be presented to the human eye. That is all in the affidavit. There is mention in the affidavit that one of these prisoners was caught by the heels, and, while manacled, dragged by his heels down to the cells. The prisoner is no less a person than the chairman of the Kerry County Council, Mr. McKenna, and I may mention that one of the prisoners is my own nephew. His brother, a captain in the Leinsters, was killed in France last year. Another brother is serving in the Navy, and the only treatment that the Government has for the third brother is to drag him to gaol. I think the question whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Trinity College (Sir E. Carson) spent £31 on drinks and £5 on cigars at a party of American journalists is a small matter as compared with the terrible story told in that affidavit.

I have not the smallest doubt that those who were capable of that misconduct are capable of attempting a false defence of it, and I am going to make the same suggestion on this subject as I made upon the other. Is this a matter worthy of British inquiry? Is this a matter worthy of a Select Committee or a Royal Commission? It is many years now—I think it was in 1892—since we had a Royal Commission on Prison Treatment in Ireland. I remember that the present Lord Middleton was chairman of it, and, as the result of the Report of that Commission, a very great change was brought about. This matter should not rest between the Catholic chaplain, the maker of the affidavit, and the right hon. Gentleman. It should be a matter in which the prison officials should appear before a Commission of honest Englishmen, who would fairly pass judgment on the circumstances. It is not a matter to be tossed on one side by a reply in this House saying that these things are exaggerated. There are ninety men, a crowd of witnesses, to speak on the subject as well as the Catholic chaplain of Belfast Prison, and I respectfully suggest that if you have any hope whatever of reconciling the Irish people to your administration these matters are far more worthy of inquiry than whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Trinity College spent £5 on cigars at a party of American journalists.

The CHIEF SECRETARY for IRELAND (Mr. Shortt). I was not aware that my hon. and learned Friend was raising any question of Ireland until some time after he had commenced his speech, and I must therefore apologise to him for not having heard the whole of what he has said but I think I have heard sufficient to show me that he has attacked the Irish Government on three grounds—first, that they have interned from eighty to ninety Irish subjects without trial; secondly, that they have refused to allow Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington to return to Ireland, and have put upon half-pay the soldier who was responsible for her husband's death; and his third charge, apparently, is the treatment of the prisoners in Belfast. If my hon. and learned Friend has raised any other point, I must apologise for not having heard it, but, as I

have said, I did not know until some time after he had commenced his speech that he was raising any Irish subject at all.

Mr. DEVLIN Would it not have been well if the right hon. and learned Gentleman had heard the whole of the statement made by other Irish Members before he had replied, because he complained about this very Government procedure the other day?

Mr. SHORTT The other day, when I waited for Irish Members to get up and supplement what had been said by the hon. Member for East Mayo (Mr. Dillon), I was met with jeering laughter from those benches because of my delay. I gathered then that their preference was that I should get up at once, and why I should be rebuked to-day for having done that which apparently they desired the other day I do not know.

Mr. DEVLIN Because we expected, the Prime Minister to speak, and he did not.

Mr. SHORTT I will take, first of all, the third charge made by my hon. Friend. I had seen the affidavit sworn by Mr. Kenny. It is an affidavit which contains the very gravest accusations against the governor, doctor, and everyone connected with the government of Belfast Prison. It is an affidavit which it was impossible for me to allow to go without careful investigation. I made such inquiries as I could. I made inquiries of the governor and of the doctor. My hon. and learned Friend has not informed the House that among other things which were said in the course of this affidavit was that while 200 police were batoning these prisoners the doctor and the governor were looking on. The affidavit further says that a very large number of the prisoners had to have very serious baton wounds attended to. I am assured by the doctor and by the governor, and by everyone concerned, that not a baton was drawn, and the doctor did not attend to one single baton wound of any prisoner. I am told that the suggestions made about the sending of men to Mass still manacled, and without being allowed to relieve the ordinary wants of nature, are absolutely untrue. Now there is a distinct conflict between those two statements. My hon. and learned Friend has proposed that the matter should be inquired into. I had already made up my mind that it should be inquired into, and my intention had been to ask some Irish judge whom I thought would command the confidence of all Irishmen to inquire into the question carefully. If my hon. and learned Friend would prefer an English judge, it is immaterial to me. I am prepared to have either.

Mr. DEVLIN Will the judge from Ireland be a member of the Provisional Government?

Mr. SHORTT That is a very unworthy interruption. I am trying to deal fairly with this matter. I am trying to meet my hon. and learned Friend's charges as fairly as I can. I said a judge—an Irish judge. I will go further, and, if my hon. and learned Friend chooses, I will consult with him as to whom he would suggest as a good judge who would command confidence. I do not care whether it is an English or an Irish judge. I am determined that this matter shall be tested, because this affidavit is being spread broadcast throughout Ireland from some place or other. I am assured that it is a tissue of such gross exaggerations as to amount to gross falsehood. If that is correct, then let us know it. If the affidavit is correct, then those in charge of the prison and who behaved in the way suggested must be dealt with. That is what I propose.

It being a Quarter-past Eight of the clock, and there being Private Business set down by direction of the Chairman of Ways and Means, under Standing Order No. 8, further Proceeding was postponed without Question put.