

Mr. **KENT HUGHES** (Minister of Labour).—For the purpose of official record, I state that I accept the suggestion of the honorable member for Flemington, which I think is a very good one, and will overcome the monopoly question.

The clause, as amended, was agreed to. The Bill was reported to the House with amendments, and the amendments were adopted.

Mr. **KENT HUGHES** (Minister of Labour).—I move—

That this Bill be now read a third time.

Lady **PEACOCK** (*Allandale*).—It is with great pleasure that, on the first occasion on which I rise to address the House, I find that I have to direct my attention to the all-important subject of factories legislation. Every honorable member will, I believe, readily agree that there could hardly be a subject with more appeal to a political recruit, more especially one of my sex, than the one now before the House. Broadly, it may be said to embody some of the finest principles of mankind and to be flowing over with provisions against hardships, ill-health, and tending to the promotion of the happiness of the worker. It is indeed possible that I am not the recruit on this subject that my comparatively short experience in this House might indicate, inasmuch as honorable members are well aware that outside of it I have lived for many years in the atmosphere of factories and shops legislation and its associations, have always followed its progress before I entered this House, and am now naturally glad to be associated with the further step represented by this Bill. When we look back to and read of the wretched conditions of shops and factories employees in the past, and the crushing burdens imposed on men, women, and children who were apparently regarded as mere machines to be worn out, when useless to be thrown away and replaced by others from a glutted supply, it is then that we are forced to recognize the wisdom and beneficence of what has been done by way of alleviation to the sufferers by the various factories and shops enactments which have been passed. In this connexion I would particularly refer to clause 23 of the Bill, which deals with out-workers.

The relief given in this State may be said to date from 1873 when an Act forbidding the employment of any female for more than 8 hours a day in any factory, which was defined to be a place where not less than 10 persons were working, was passed. Apparently, at this early stage, the hardships of one sex were beginning to be recognized and some alleviation given, but those of the other sex, both adult and child, were allowed to continue. Then in 1885 came a much wider measure in which the principles of health, sanitation, and safety were given effect to, trading hours and general regulation of working conditions being provided for. Previously employees could be kept at work in shops to whatever hour employers chose to keep their shops open.

From that time onward further legislative provision was made from time to time, culminating in the Act of 1895 when our present Wages Board system was introduced. This legislation, I am very proud and happy to remind honorable members, was introduced by my late husband, Sir Alexander Peacock, and surely no man could have a greater monument. By this time the community had gradually been educated to recognize the necessity of securing the health, safety, and reasonable leisure of this class of workers, not merely in the interest of the workers themselves but as a vital national necessity.

To-day in Victoria it may be said that the worker in factories and shops is better looked after as to his or her wages, personal safety, health, moral surroundings, and general conditions of work than in any other part of the world. Leisure is ensured by the closing of all shops, with a few necessary exceptions, at 6 p.m., with a Saturday or other half-holiday a week—a boon of enormous value. I know that when the Saturday half-holiday was brought about my husband was very keen on it because he felt that it would benefit the people by their being able to take part in recreation on Saturday afternoon, and observe the Sabbath as a day of rest, but it worked in the opposite way. People left their homes on Saturday afternoon, and spent the whole week-end in recreation.

The rates of wages in the different industries and the conditions of employment are now fixed under the Wages Board system to which I have already

referred. The Wages Board system is now recognized generally as the most perfect system of fixing fair wages and conditions that has yet been devised. It is economical, it takes no cognizance of strikes, it is representative of workers and employers, and provides the fullest means to the workers of assuring themselves fair living wages and conditions, with means for their adjustment as occasion demands. Since 1895, as occasion has required, further legislative action has been found necessary with changing circumstances, and particularly the vastly increased use of machinery. But it may be truly said that the principles underlying the whole system, however details may alter, were definitely settled by 1895, and are never likely to be altered. New conditions will demand possibly additional legislative or administrative action, but the pioneers did their work well.

The present Bill is an illustration of this. Settled principles are untouched, but detailed provisions, all vitally affecting the factory and shop worker, are included in it. Different industries demand different treatment. New processes demand new expedients for giving effect to the established principles. One important matter is that the scope of factories legislation—even before this Bill—had been widened to include out-workers, their children, and persons employed by them. Provision is also made in the Bill on this important subject. Time will not permit me to refer in detail to the many provisions which this House is now considering. It is sufficient to say that they mark another step in the already remarkable progress made in this class of legislation, and I feel that both the Government and the Opposition are to be congratulated on the way the Bill has been brought forward and treated. I trust that it will soon become law, and again I feel very proud that I have been able to stand up in this House, which is really representative of the people, and give my support to legislation, which, I feel, is not only due and necessary, but reflects the highest instincts of humanity.

Before I resume my seat, I should like to give a few figures which will illustrate the vast scope and growth of this class of legislation. In 1873, when the original legislation was passed, this small provision was administered by the Board of

Public Health, and under the Act of 1885, which, as I have said, was a much larger statute, there were in 1886 1,949 factories and 39,506 employees. Under the 1895 legislation, when the Wages Boards were instituted, there were in 1896 five Wages Boards, 3,370 factories, and 40,814 employees. In 1915, when shops were first registered, there were 141 Wages Boards, 33,887 factories and shops, and 117,520 employees. In 1925 there were 181 Wages Boards, 44,866 factories and shops, and 164,925 employees. In 1932 there were 185 Wages Boards, 51,408 factories and shops, and 162,376 employees. This will, I am sure, convince all members of the importance and merit of our work when we are considering this class of legislation. I thank honorable members for the kind way in which they have listened to me, and also for their good wishes to me since I have been in the House.

Mr. MICHAELIS (*St. Kilda*).—Honorable members have been deeply touched in listening to the honorable member for Allandale speak upon a subject that was so dear to the heart of her late husband, and one in which he was so vitally concerned. Knowing that she was to address this House to-night I thought it might be interesting to honorable members if I looked up the *Hansard* record of the speech made by her late husband when he first introduced factories legislation on the 17th of October, 1895. Sir Alexander Peacock, or Mr. Peacock as he then was, was Chief Secretary in the Ministry led by Sir George Turner, who was one of my predecessors in the representation of St. Kilda. Other members of the House at that time were such well known figures as Mr. H. B. Higgins, Mr. I. A. Isaacs, now Sir Isaac Isaacs, the Governor-General of the Commonwealth, Sir Graham Berry, who was Speaker of the House at that time, and the present member for Footscray, who is the only surviving member who was present on that occasion. Factories legislation was introduced in England in the early times with a view to wiping out the terrible abuses of child labour and slavery which have been alluded to by the honorable member for Allandale in her fine address. That legislation was gradually introduced into the Victorian statutes and by degrees the question of the prevention of sweating became one of paramount importance.