

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 1864

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Wednesday, 7 September, 1864.

Servants' Home. — Navigation of the Fitzroy. — The Prorogation.

SERVANTS' HOME.

Mr. PUGH moved,—"That this House will, to-morrow, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, to consider of an address to the Governor, praying that His Excellency will be pleased to cause to be placed on the Additional Supplementary Estimates for 1864, a sum not exceeding £500, in aid of the Servants' Home, Brisbane." He would point out that there was an urgent necessity that the assistance asked for by this motion should be rendered. The institution was not one of a local character, but of a general nature. Although it had been opened only in December of last year, yet since that time nearly

300 girls had been admitted into the institution, and subsequently provided with situations. The Home had been found valuable, as it afforded lodging to many respectable girls on their arrival, who would otherwise have had to seek temporary shelter in low houses, where they would have been subject to temptation. He might state that he had placed this motion on the paper in pursuance of a request from the committee of the Home. He maintained that it was a question in which the whole Colony was interested, as many servants hired from the establishment had been sent to Ipswich, the Downs, and other parts of the Colony. At present there were many single girls who, on leaving an emigrant ship, were not provided with such quarters as they ought to have. Were the Home placed on a more prosperous foundation, they might be taken from the ship to the Home, and the Government would thus be relieved, to a considerable extent, of a burden, whilst the immigrants of this class would be better provided for. The Home, at present, could only accommodate from twelve to twenty persons, whilst a very high rent had to be paid for the premises. The Government had already granted a piece of ground as a site for a building, and the object of the grant now asked for, was to furnish the committee with funds in order to erect the building. The institution was at present self-supporting, but it was barely self-supporting; and these funds were required for the object stated.

The COLONIAL TREASURER said that this was another instance of those frequent applications for grants of money, in aid of private institutions, which he had felt himself obliged to protest against so frequently during the present session. Had the House definitely laid down the principle that such demands should not be acceded to, and adhered to it, at the commencement of the session, they would have saved the country a large expenditure. However, they had not done so; they had been called upon to vote money for the Acclimatisation Society, Dr. Lang, the Lying-in Hospital—and, indeed, an institution for any conceivable object seemed to think itself entitled to a vote of money, or a grant of land. As regarded the motion under discussion, he did not see how the House could object to it with any consistency. He merely rose to do what he had done before, viz., to enter a formal protest against all such motions. The Colony was not able to afford these sums. There was, at the end of 1863, a deficit which they would have to meet by borrowing money. He would ask, would all these sums voted as grants in aid have to be borrowed? The House should not be called upon to vote grants in aid to institutions before the Colony was in a position to afford such grants. The system was wrong in principle, and would result in their having a larger deficit at the end of this year than at the end of last year. If next year he held his present position, he would, in his financial

statement, embody a list of the votes for money brought into the House without the sanction of the Government, and the House would then see the necessity for economy. He admitted the desirability of encouraging charitable institutions, but the House ought not to make grants if they had to borrow the money. If the resolutions did go into committee, the proviso at least should be added that a like sum be raised by private subscription.

Mr. TAYLOR opposed the motion. Every town in the Colony would soon be asking for similar grants. These continual demands for grants of money or grants of land for asylums, Freemasons' homes, and such institutions, all tended to show the centralising policy of the Government. ("Oh, oh.") It was a fact—all this money was to be laid out on Brisbane. For his own part, he would not mind seeing the Parliament moved out of Brisbane, as other influence might then be brought to bear upon the Government.

Mr. R. CRIBB should oppose the motion on principle, as he had opposed similar motions. He subscribed to the institution, and wished it well, but he should not vote for this resolution.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said that he had endeavored to persuade the parties interested, to postpone the asking of this grant until next session, and he knew that the original objections to making grants to private societies increased in force with every fresh demand. He could not help concurring in the opinion of the Colonial Treasurer, that these sundry odds and ends agreed to by the House served in the aggregate to greatly increase the expenditure of the Colony. However, he considered that in this case justice had not been done to the institution, owing to the way in which the subject had come before the House. Great good had undoubtedly been done by the institution—single women, owing to the accommodation in the dépôt not being of the best character, had gone to the Home, and thence obtained service. In this way it had done work which emigration societies could not do, and had aided the Government. The promoters of the institution deserved thanks for the efforts made, as they had adopted the best way by which single women could be provided for. He conceived, however, that if a grant of money were made, it should be given out of the emigration fund. He thought there was no necessity to take a vote of the House on this occasion, if there were a general feeling against the motion, as he did not conceive that he would be acting wrongly, if he desired the ladies connected with this institution to spend money on behalf of the Government for rations and other things at times for the single women, whom they might in this way accommodate, and be enabled to assist. (Hear, hear.) He certainly would not feel that he was acting wrongly in making a recommendation that

rations should be given for a certain number of female immigrants in connection with the committee of the Servants' Home.

Mr. DOUGLAS wished to know if the Colonial Secretary gave a definite pledge to grant a sum of money.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I do not promise a grant of money, but rations.

Mr. DOUGLAS: If that were the case the object of the motion would not be attained. The grant was desired in order to enable the committee to build upon the land already granted. If the money were granted conditionally, there might be a considerable difficulty in raising the requisite amount by private subscription. He did not say it could not be raised, but there would be difficulty and delay. He looked upon the institution as one of the adjuncts of our immigration system, and as such it was regarded by Mr. Jordan, who thought it very desirable to make known at home the fact that there was such an institution in existence. He thought that the House might make a direct grant, if it were promised that the building should not at once be commenced. He protested against the spirit in which the Colonial Treasurer had met this and similar motions. The grants voted in aid this session did not exceed he believed £5,000 at the utmost.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: Dr. Lang.

Mr. DOUGLAS: Yes, including the sum voted for Dr. Lang, that amount had not been exceeded; and these small sums for the various objects were well laid out, and repaid the Colony indirectly. It was in regard to the large sums that the House was inclined to credulity and recklessness.

Mr. BLAKENEY supported the motion.

Mr. MACKENZIE agreed with the Colonial Treasurer, that perpetual claims of grants of land or money from private members for charitable, or educational, or commercial institutions, were not desirable. He knew, when in office, the inconvenience of this mode of procedure to the Treasurer. However, the House having granted land worth £10,000 to a gas company, and money or land to various other associations, they could not with consistency refuse this demand. He favored the suggestion that it should be requisite, before the money was granted, that a like amount should be raised by private subscription.

The SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS expressed himself in opposition to the motion, as it was of an exacting nature, considering that the Home had just been endowed with a valuable grant of land. If the motion were carried this session, they could not expect to get the money until next session, as it would have to appear in the Estimates, and be voted by the House. That resolution would not be an authority to the Government to advance the money required. It had been alleged by his colleagues, when he had made the proposition for bestowing the grant of land upon the institution, that the next thing would be a

demand for a sum of money to build—and such had proved to be the case. They might, at least, have allowed more time to elapse before making the second demand. The honorable member had also not offered much information as to the amount of good done by the Servants' Home. He believed the premises could not accommodate more than twelve or so, and therefore its area of operation must have been hitherto very limited. If the ladies who were ardent in the cause of philanthropy, would extend their work of visiting the emigration barracks, where the single women were placed, they could perhaps do a great deal of good, and every assistance would be extended to them in their efforts to assist the inmates. He did not wish the House or the country to imagine, from these observations, that he was opposed to the Servants' Home. He was a subscriber, and would not object to increase his subscription, but he protested against the colonial revenue being made a wet-nurse for institutions of this kind.

Mr. PUGH, in reply, maintained that the object of the motion was to remove the objection urged by the Minister for Lands, that the area of the Home's operations was limited. This motion was brought forward in order to enable the subscribers to increase that area. The Colonial Secretary's offer was fair, but it did not meet the object contemplated by the resolution—that object was, to enable the committee to erect a suitable building, and to be freed from their present high rent, accompanied as it was with such limited accommodation. He had no objection to amend the resolution by adding a proviso to the effect that a like amount to that asked for should be raised by private contributions and fees.

The resolution, as thus amended, was then put and passed without a division.

NAVIGATION OF THE FITZROY.

Mr. DOUGLAS moved,—“That it be an instruction to the Secretary for Lands and Works to take immediate steps for effectually removing the impediments to navigation at the Upper Flats, in the River Fitzroy.” He stated that the case was an urgent one, and merited the stringent expressions contained in the resolution. They had three main navigable rivers in Queensland, viz., the Brisbane, the Mary, and the Fitzroy. A large amount of money had been spent upon the Brisbane, and properly spent as far as the intention was concerned. Whether the result would show that the most judicious expenditure of this money had been adopted, was a question about which there was difference of opinion. Some considerable result had been obtained, but at a very large expenditure. The Mary presented less obstacles to navigation than the other rivers, with one trifling exception, a prominent rock, which might eventually be removed; but even at present a ship drawing fifteen feet of water might, without much risk, be laid alongside of the

wharf at Maryborough. Proceeding further north, they came to the Fitzroy. At the entrance of this river there was no bar, and there was good anchorage up to Broad Mount; but as you proceeded up the river, there were impediments in the shape of flats. Steamers were seldom detained at the Lower Flats; but the Upper Flats were such a serious impediment to navigation that they merited, and ought to receive, the consideration of the honorable gentleman opposite—the Minister for Lands and Works. There were sandbanks here, which, at low tide, impeded the navigation of the river. The Fitzroy, with an expenditure of less than one-tenth of the amount laid out upon the experiment at the Brisbane bar, might be converted into a far superior navigable river as far as Rockhampton, than this river as far as Brisbane. He could not excuse the Minister for Lands and Works for his display of real indifference, he never having attempted to meet the question in the manner it merited. He found, on referring to the Auditor-General's report, that previous to 1863, some £23,000 had been expended for purposes in connection with the clearing of the Brisbane bar. In addition to that, he found that on the 24th of May last, some £22,000 had been disbursed for the same purpose out of the vote for harbors and rivers; and, including various other charges, he inferred that up to the present date a sum not far short of £60,000 had been expended on the Brisbane bar. He did not cavil at this, but he believed that the results at present attained were quite incommensurate with the money expended, and that a sum at least equal to that which already had been expended would be required to complete the work as at present projected; and even then it would be necessary to keep the dredge in constant use, for the purpose of keeping the cutting clear. The expenditure would be interminable and unsatisfactory. What he now claimed was, consideration for a public work of practicable dimension—a work which was anxiously demanded by the trading community, and which, at an infinitely less cost than that contemplated in the case of the Brisbane, would make the Fitzroy the noblest navigable river in Queensland. The evidence given by Lieutenant Heath before the Select Committee on Harbors and Rivers was most valuable—more valuable, perhaps, than any other evidence. It was the custom, and had been the habit, of the honorable gentlemen opposite to decry that officer. Before the appointment of this committee, he (Mr. Douglas) had not had an opportunity of forming an opinion as to the capacity of Lieutenant Heath; but his high idea of that gentleman's evidence now arose from the conviction that he understood his subject, and did not speak without book. Some of his opinions might have to be taken *cum grano salis*.

The SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS: The House is not discussing the committee's report now.

MR. DOUGLAS: He was merely referring to the report incidentally, in support of his motion. The valuable appendix to the evidence of Mr. Heath attached to the report, showed how these shoals formed in our rivers. That officer gives the following evidence:—

“When, from natural causes, a long straight reach is formed in any tidal river, shoals are almost invariably found in some portion of the reach, forming a flat entirely across the river. The immediate cause of the formation of these shoals is, that the ebb and flood tides are thrown on opposite sides of the river, or one or other of the streams is dispersed over the whole width of the river bed, so losing, in a great measure, its power of cutting a clear channel of its own, and at the same time running across the channel cut by the other tide. The only way to permanently open a deep navigable channel through such shoals, is to remove the causes or alter the conditions which led to their original formation; to effect which, all that is necessary, is to throw by embankments, the flood and ebb streams into one true channel. If one stream is dispersed over the whole width of the river bed, it may also be necessary to throw that stream towards one bank of the river, and it may in some cases be necessary to protect from abrasion any portions of the bank against which the newly-directed stream may impinge. To attempt to dredge a channel through such a shoal, while the conditions which caused the deposit still exist, can, as a permanent work, be, in most cases, but an expensive and ultimately useless experiment; though, on the other hand, where the abrading power of the stream, and the amount of deposit is small, it may sometimes be a feasible method of temporarily attaining the desired object. Were the ebb and flood streams thrown into one true channel, as I have suggested, there would not—where the tide had any abrading power, and where the deposit was of sand and other loose material—be any necessity for dredging at all, the shoals would disappear with little or no artificial assistance. When the size and specific gravity of the particles forming the deposit were such as to resist the action of the stream, it would be necessary to dredge the channel in the first instance, but the shoal would never reform. More than one-half the deposited shoals which hinder the navigation of the tidal rivers of this Colony, are caused in the manner above stated; among the most important of which are the Upper Flats in the Brisbane, and the Upper Flats in the Fitzroy Rivers. The remainder are principally caused by the river making a double channel and passing on either side of an island. Shoals which are formed under these circumstances can, in almost every case, be removed, or their re-formation prevented, by applying a remedy on the same principles as those I have already laid down. Where the bottom is of a loose or shifting nature, I should suggest that the embankments should be principally formed of iron screw piles, to be filled in between with such materials as the circumstances of the case might render advisable.”

Mr. Plews had recommended a plan which he (Mr. Douglas) believed would be found to be impracticable, and to effect which a river wall for a considerable distance, would have to be built. The proposition of Mr. Heath was

more likely to be successful, and could be completed according to his estimate for about one-third of the sum. He thought this a matter of great importance, and he desired to know whether the Minister for Lands and Works had ever visited the spot, or sent an officer down to inspect it. This river might justly claim an equal share of attention to that devoted to the Brisbane. The session was now drawing to a close, and this was the only opportunity he might have of bringing the matter under the notice of the House for some months. The resolution was so worded as to make it imperative upon the Government to take action.

The SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS said that the language of the resolution being imperative, he took objection to it. This was a money vote, and involved a large expenditure. He wished to know from the Speaker whether the honorable member had adopted a proper form in bringing forward this resolution. He believed that under our present constitution all money votes must come from the Crown, and the proper course for the honorable member to have taken would have been to address His Excellency, by resolution, for a distinct sum of money for the object stated.

Mr. DOUGLAS, before this point was decided, wished to observe that a sum of £120,000 for harbors and rivers had already been voted, and he now only asked that a portion of this sum should be devoted to a particular work. According to the argument of the Minister for Lands he would have had no right to expend the various items for the Brisbane dredge works without additional sanction.

The SPEAKER apprehended that it was intended by the mover that the money should come out of the vote for harbors and rivers, and he, therefore, did not conceive the resolution to be informal.

The SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS proceeded. He agreed with the mover that the language of the resolution was strong, and his manner during the delivery of his speech had been most dictatorial. He (Mr. Douglas) had made unwarrantable assertions with great boldness, and those assertions proved that the honorable member knew nothing about the subject upon which he was commenting. It was evident that he knew nothing about the departments of the Government. They had heard a good deal about the committee, but the fact was that the committee had never sought for that information as to the actions of the Government, of which the honorable member was apparently in ignorance. That honorable member, however, now came forward and asked that the House should instruct the head of a department to spend a sum of money, the amount required for which was unknown to him, upon a certain work. The honorable member ought to have stated the sum of money which would be required; he was not justified in asking the House, under the garb of a resolution, to pledge themselves

to an unknown expenditure. So far as this Upper Flat was concerned, no complaint had reached his ears till within the last four or five months. He (the Minister for Lands) then adopted his usual course. The Government have an officer appointed at Rockhampton, than whom there was not a more competent man in the Colony to carry out engineering work, whatever the honorable member might insinuate to the contrary. He asked that officer's opinion upon these flats, and he soon after forwarded a report. Whether that report was well-founded was not the question. He (the Minister for Lands) had been accused upon grounds which were not correct. Mr. Heath gave one opinion, and Mr. Plews another—and who was to decide? Mr. Plews said that £35,000 would be sufficient for the work according to his scheme. Mr. Heath was in favor of performing the work partly by embankments and partly by harrowing. Was he (the Minister for Lands) to go to the Fitzroy and to be expected to carry off the flats? The work would be a work of time, just as the clearance of the river bar in the Brisbane was a work of time. It had been urged by Lieutenant Heath, in favor of his plan, that in the clearance of the Danube the plan of harrowing had been adopted, but from all the information he (the Minister for Lands) could collect, instead of a success, it had there proved a failure. He would also point out that the Fitzroy ran with a current of eight knots an hour, whilst the Brisbane was comparatively a quiet river; and a plan adapted to the Brisbane and Bremer might not, therefore, be most suitable for the impediments mentioned in the Fitzroy. It was the intention of the Government to at once commence the attempt to give temporary relief to the inhabitants of Rockhampton, as regarded this obstruction to navigation. The taunt of indifference to this question made by the honorable member was unwarranted by anything that he (the Minister for Lands) had done, or by anything that had occurred. He would ask where were the funds to carry out the recommendations of the Harbors and Rivers Committee to be derived from? If the recommendation of the report were carried out, an additional half a million of money would be required; and even then the suggestions would not all be fulfilled. He objected to the assertion of the honorable member that no steps were being taken to remove the difficulties complained of, and he also objected to the dictatorial way in which that gentleman had come down to the House and asserted that the Government had taken no course of action.

Mr. DOUGLAS, in reply, defended the phraseology of his resolution. It was stringently and emphatically worded, but he thought that the time had come when it was necessary to put the question in such a form, if a practical effect were desired. He was astonished to hear the honorable member

state that he had never heard complaints of the impediments at the place mentioned until a few months ago. He (Mr. Douglas) had heard of them ever since he had been connected with the district, and upon occasions previous to this he had brought them under the attention of the House. The Australasian Steam Navigation Company had, he believed, more than once made strong representations. It was objected that he had not mentioned a definite sum as the probable expenditure; but what was the probable expenditure on the Brisbane bar—had that been ever ascertained before the work was commenced? On the contrary, it was said “Here is a work which must be done, cost what it may—and it *shall* be done.” (Laughter, and hear, hear.) Here in the Fitzroy—a river second in importance only to the Brisbane—was a work which had to be carried out, cost what it may. It would not cost one-tenth part of what would have to be expended on the Brisbane bar. Then, again, it had been objected by the Minister for Lands, “Where are the funds to be found?” The House had voted a sum of £120,000 for harbors and rivers, to be raised by loan, and he presumed that the funds were to be found out of that loan. If the loan could not be raised, it was the duty of the Ministry to announce the fact to the House. He only desired to claim for the Fitzroy its fair rateable proportion of expenditure out of this loan. It had been said that a dredge was building for the Fitzroy, but they had recently not heard much about it, and the title of this dredge, viz., the “Bremer,” was somewhat ominous of the nature of the service to which it might be devoted. (Laughter.) He believed that £10,000 was being expended between here and Ipswich.

THE SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS: Scarcely one-tenth of that at present.

MR. DOUGLAS: Well, whatever works were being carried on up to the present time appeared to him to be more harmful than beneficial. He would point to the Seventeen-mile Rocks, where the channel was getting narrower every day. He trusted that what he had said would relieve the honorable gentleman of the idea that he (Mr. Douglas) desired to make him the victim of unscrupulous aspersion; he simply blamed him for dilatoriness, and he trusted that he would amend his ways.

The question was then put and passed.

THE PROROGATION.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY moved the adjournment of the House until Tuesday next, it being the pleasure of His Excellency the Governor to come down to the Council at three o'clock on Tuesday to prorogue Parliament.

THE SPEAKER took this opportunity at the close of the session of tendering his most grateful thanks to honorable members for the very orderly manner in which the business of the House had been carried on. It had been

a great gratification to himself, and, no doubt, a great satisfaction to honorable members, that hardly upon one occasion had it been necessary for him to call an honorable member to order from the chair. (Hear, hear.) Their debates, although some of them had been warm ones, had been carried on in a gentlemanly manner, and with a due regard to the usages of Parliament; rarely had language been used to which any one could take exception. From the commencement it seemed to him that honorable members on both sides of the House had resolved to carry on business with a fixed purpose to sink all party differences, and to address themselves to that only which they deemed was best for the country. If it should please God that he should meet the House next session, and occupy his present position, he trusted that he should be enabled again to congratulate honorable members on the same gentlemanly deportment which had been so happily experienced during the passed session.

The House then adjourned at thirty minutes after five o'clock, until Tuesday next, at half-past two o'clock.