

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 10 MAY 1865

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Wednesday, 10 May, 1865.

Queensland Volunteers.

QUEENSLAND VOLUNTEERS.

Mr. MACKENZIE : Sir, I have been induced to bring forward the motion which stands in my name on the business paper for to-day, in the hope of raising some discussion on the volunteer question, before the Estimates are laid upon the table of the House, in which, I suppose the item will again appear. I wish it to be understood that I am, by no means, inimical to the volunteer movement in this colony. The conviction has, however, been forced upon me, that after a trial of five years it has proved a decided failure. It has been nursed and encouraged in every possible way,

but all attempts to establish a force have hitherto been unavailing. A stranger arriving in Brisbane, and looking over the advertisements in the papers, would arrive at the conclusion that we have at least two strong battalions. He would see a brigade order to the effect that No. 1 Company were to meet at such an hour, and that No. 2 Company were to do so and so. But how does the matter really stand? Although two companies have been formed, there is hardly a single member of either corps who attends drill. If these advertisements and brigade orders signified that we have a force at our disposal sufficient to frighten away an enemy, they would be all very well. But the reverse is the case; and if we are to vote an annual sum to support the volunteers, we must at any rate see that we get the value of our money. Now, in the other colonies—in Victoria and New South Wales—we find that the volunteer movement tends to some political use. Each of those colonies possess several strong and well organised corps; while here we have not a force of sufficient strength to repel the attack of an ordinary cruiser, such as appeared in the harbor the other day. I will address myself first to the state of the volunteer force in Brisbane. They always appear to have a grievance: at first it was that they were not allowed to take home their arms. This they considered a grievance, and the result was that they were allowed the entire control over their arms, which I have no doubt suffered in consequence. Well, sir, they got over this grievance, the company was re-organised; they got on very well for a time, every encouragement was afforded to induce the members to attend regularly to drill, but to little or no purpose, and the company gradually fell off. Now they have another grievance; they do not like their officers, which is the more to be wondered at, as they are commanded by a known and tried soldier—a gentleman who holds a high position in the colony, under whom they ought to be proud to serve. I feel that it is needless for me to say more upon that point. With regard to the captain of the company, I may say that he appears to have exerted himself to the utmost, and to have spared neither time nor money in his endeavors to render the corps an efficient one. I wish to observe that I am alluding more particularly to the rifle corps. The artillery corps appears to be better organised and in a more efficient state; in fact, they appear to be a very nice and respectable company. They fire the salutes very well, and in other respects appear to be up to the mark. Admitting this, however, what use would they be if an enemy came in sight? It is true that the Government have made them a present of several old, battered, honeycombed pieces of ordnance, made in the good old days of Queen Bess, and utterly useless in repelling any hostile force. If the artillery force is to

be maintained for the sole purpose of firing salutes, the expense might be done away with, as the military now in the barracks could perform that duty quite as well. With reference to the Ipswich company, no doubt they have acquitted themselves in a more respectable way. It was very derogatory to the Brisbane volunteers that they should have allowed the Ipswich corps to come down to the metropolis to do their duty for them, and should have met them in such a dog-in-the-manger spirit; for, after the affair was all over, they called a meeting actually to ask who paid for the refreshments given to the volunteers from Ipswich! That is, at least, what they are said to have done, for I am speaking only from the newspaper reports. Presuming, then, that it has been found impossible to keep up a volunteer force in Brisbane, we must consider how we are placed with regard to the Ipswich force. Are the residents in the capital to depend upon the volunteers in Ipswich to prevent their homes from being sacked and plundered? Would the volunteers, without any subsidiary force, be of any use in repelling an enemy? That is the real question to be considered. I think, sir, it must be answered in the negative, though, I have no doubt, if the honorable and gallant member for Ipswich, Dr. Challinor, or the honorable and gallant Attorney-General were present, they would be able to throw some further light on the subject. I wish, sir, to ask the House whether it is desirable to maintain the Ipswich corps of volunteers, or to do away with the vote altogether. I am of opinion that, in their present condition, the volunteer companies in Queensland can be of no service whatever to the country; and I feel quite sure it would be far more satisfactory to the honorable and gallant colonel,* to have under him an efficient and well-disciplined force, than one from which he can derive no credit or satisfaction whatever. I will now, sir, move,—That an Address be presented to the Governor, praying that His Excellency will be pleased to cause to be laid on the Table of this House, Returns shewing—“(1.) The various items of expenditure chargeable to the vote for volunteer purposes for the years 1864 and 1865, distinguishing the sums paid for salaries, forage allowances, and uniforms. (2.) The number of volunteers, distinguishing horse, foot, and artillery, that were enrolled in the books during the years 1864 and 1865, at Brisbane, Ipswich, and Rockhampton. (3.) The number of drill nights, and average attendance of each arm of the service at those drills. (4.) The average attendance at the monthly parades during the year. (5.) The number of uniforms issued and not returned by volunteers who have resigned, or been dismissed for breaches of the Act now in force, or who never attend inspections.”

The question was put and passed without debate.