

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 17 AUGUST 1865

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of calling the attention of honorable members to a subject of great importance, in connection with the immigration question. The matter will, perhaps, be best explained by a letter which I hold in my hand, addressed to me by a gentleman particularly interested in this question. It is from Mr. H. W. Coxen, and with the permission of the House I will read it:—

“Brisbane, 16th August, 1865.

“Dear Sir,

“Enclosed I beg to send you an original agreement entered into by the Emigration Commissioner for the colony, between the writer and Charles Williamson, as I look upon the proceeding as a very arbitrary one. I also enclose my notes of the facts, and shall thank you to take such steps in the matter as you may deem advisable.

“I remain, &c.,

“H. W. COXEN.

“Gordon Sandeman, Esquire, M.L.A.”

MEMO.

“I had an interview with the Colonial Secretary about the month of February, 1864, to know if I could import my own labor, and on what terms. His reply was that I could introduce my own labor, and be entitled to a shipper's order of £18 for every adult immigrant, if approved of by the Emigration Agent in England as eligible.

“Upon this information I communicated with J. A. Carter, Esquire, of Leadenhall street, London, as my agent, that any proceeds of wool sales might be applied for the introduction of labor, and sent him a copy of the agreement under which I usually hire my servants here, and requested him not to deviate in any way from these instructions, which were to the effect that each adult was to be conveyed from England to my station in Queensland free of all cost, and then to serve me as a generally useful servant for two years, with the usual rations—14lbs. meat, 8lbs. flour, 2lbs. sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb tea, weekly—and for the first year to receive £20, and the second year £40.

“Mr. Carter engaged Charles Williamson on these terms, and when taken to the Emigration Commissioner was refused a passage, unless he consented to the agreement now produced. Having some sheep on board, my agent was compelled to comply, and paid the Government £20 for his passage. On my receiving the duplicate agreement, I again waited on the Colonial Secretary, who informed me he was unaware of any such arrangement, and declined to interfere in determining the man's wages, but availed himself of the opportunity of examining the man himself who confirmed my statement in every respect.

“I then made a fresh agreement with the man, and feeling that an injustice had been done me as an employer of labor, I had an interview with the proprietor of the *Courier* to know if he would insert any article on the question, which, after reading the agreement, he declined.

“I was then introduced to the *Guardian*, who went more fully into the matter, but also declined interfering, as he thought the Emigration Agent was correct, as it secured to the immigrant the current rate of wages, and prevented the employer from taking any undue advantage.”

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Thursday, 17 August, 1865.

Immigration.

IMMIGRATION.

Mr. SANDEMAN: Sir, I beg to move the adjournment of this House, for the purpose

That, sir, is, I believe, a correct statement of the case, and it appears to me rather an arbitrary proceeding on the part of Mr. Jordan, as our emigration agent at home, to take upon himself to dictate to the employer of labor in this colony, either the rate of wages to be given or the amount of rations to be supplied to the emigrants he sends out. The question of wages, I think, is one which should be regulated by the state of the labor market, and I think, Mr. Jordan, in attempting to lay down a rate of wages, is interfering with a great free trade question. I look upon his interference with the scale of rations as even more objectionable, because it may have the effect of creating a great deal of dissatisfaction throughout the country districts. A certain number of persons come out under a certain scale of rations, totally at variance with the scale which has been customary in this colony for some time past. The usual rations have been—8 lbs. flour, 14 lbs. meat, 2 lbs. sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. tea. Now we have a totally different scale introduced by Mr. Jordan, which I think he had no right to lay down. I will take the opportunity of alluding to the question put by the honorable member for Clermont, as to whether the Government are prepared to define the rate of wages at which immigrants in the country depôts should be bound to take service, after having remained in the depôts for a certain time. I think, sir, this is a most important question, and one which bears very closely upon the case now brought under the notice of the House. I believe it will be found the opinion of a number of persons that it is desirable to establish a low minimum rate of wages. If that were established there would be a stronger reason why the newly-arrived immigrant should accept the offer of employment. If, on the other hand, a high rate were defined, the immigrant would be less willing to engage himself at a reasonable remuneration. I think if the sum of £20 with rations were offered, it would be ample for a newly-arrived immigrant. It is well known that a good deal of trouble is experienced in teaching these people their duties, and also a great deal of risk in giving valuable property into their charge. So that if, in the first instance, he gets a comfortable home and a moderate rate of pay until he learns his duties, he ought to be very well satisfied. I may also take the opportunity of drawing attention to the question of immigration, as it relates to Port Denison. I observe in to-day's *Guardian* an article from the correspondent of that paper, which bears immediately upon this question. I quote the following extract:—

"Of the 360 immigrants brought us by the Maryborough, and who have been landed five weeks, there remains unengaged twelve girls and forty married couples with children. The rapidity with which the shipment has been absorbed, proves the previous need of the district."

In the same paper the following also appears :

"Little over six weeks have elapsed since the Maryborough landed her precious cargo in our town, and yet in that short time almost the whole of the immigrants have found employment, only a few married couples with numberless weans remaining. The cry is still "more;" advices are daily arriving, when too late, from distant stations for a supply of the new hands. It is therefore with great pleasure that we are able to inform our distant subscribers that the ship "Montmorency" may be expected about the early part of September, and we advise them to send their orders down in time, or they may again find that we value labor too highly to allow it to remain in the depôt till their orders arrive."

I think one great objection raised to the immigrants in the different depôts throughout the country has been the large disproportion of married couples. It is well known that, at the out-stations, this class of labor is very undesirable; and I think it would be well if the Government would take care that in future there should be a larger number of single men sent out. Again, I think it is very desirable that the Government should give some notice, say two months' notice, if possible, of the expected arrival of every immigrant ship, so that the employers may make their arrangements before hand. In speaking of Mr. Coxen, I omitted to refer to an agreement which I hold in my hand, entered into with a man named Williamson and Mr. Coxen's agent, Mr. Carter. This is an agreement which the man was compelled to make by the Emigration Commissioner, Mr. Jordan. It is this:—

"AGREEMENT made this 27th day of September, 1864, between John A. Carter, Esq., of 147, Leadenhall street, on behalf of Henry W. Coxen, Esq., of Queensland, and Charles Williamson, of 82, New North Road. The said Charles Williamson, for the consideration hereinafter mentioned, engages to go out to Queensland, in Australia, the passage being provided for himself at the sole cost of the said Henry W. Coxen, Esq., and there to serve the said Henry W. Coxen, Esq., as farm servant, for the term of two years, commencing from the day of landing, at "current rates" of wages in the colony. The sum will be between £30 and £45 per annum for the services of a single able-bodied man; between £45 and £65 for the services of man and wife, and a proportionate amount for the services of other members of the family who may be employed; * but it is agreed that the exact amount to be paid by the said Henry W. Coxen, Esq., to the said Charles Williamson shall be settled and fixed by the Government authorities on arrival of the said Charles Williamson in the colony. Besides being provided by his employer with a hut to live in, the said Charles Williamson shall receive from his employer the ordinary rations, viz. :† 10lbs. beef,

* The wages of female domestic servants for ordinary household work are from £18 to £25 per annum.

† The ordinary single ration consists of 10lbs. of beef, 10lbs. of flour, 3lbs. of sugar, and $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of tea, every week. Married couples if the services of the wife are engaged, are entitled to two full rations. Should other members of the family be employed, there must be an additional ration for every child so employed over fourteen years. In filling up the form, the number of rations must be filled in.

10lbs. flour, 3lbs. sugar, and $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. tea per week. The said John A. Carter, Esq., on the part of the said Henry W. Coxen, Esq., engages that the amount of wages shall be paid to the said Charles Williamson for the period of two years, as above stated, and that he shall be provided with the ordinary accommodation, and with the amount of rations as above stated. The said Henry W. Coxen, Esq., also engages to have the said Charles Williamson conveyed to the colony, in accordance with the Queensland Immigration Regulations, and entirely free of expense to the said Charles Williamson.

"Witness to the signatures of the said

"JOHN A. CARTER,

"CHARLES WILLIAMSON,

"T. J. FENTON, 46, Lime street.

"I, John A. Carter, do hereby declare that neither I, nor any sub-agent or other person acting under my authority, have received or agreed to receive, from or in respect of the said Henry W. Coxen, Esq., beforenamed, any fee or gratuity whatever, on account of the said Charles Williamson obtaining a passage through my instrumentality or agency. And I, the said Charles Williamson, do hereby declare that I have not paid, or caused to be paid, or promised or purposed to pay, any sum of money for my passage; but that I am informed, and believe, that the whole of the expenses attending the same are borne by the said Henry W. Coxen, Esq. And we severally make this solemn declaration conscientiously, believing the same to be true.

"JOHN A. CARTER,

"CHARLES WILLIAMSON.

"Declared at the Mansion House, in the city of London, by both declarants, this 27th day of September, 1864.

"WM. LAWRENCE, Mayor,

"Justice of the Peace.

"N.B.—This agreement will require the agreement stamp of sixpence to be affixed.

"This form of agreement being made, secures for the employer, on the arrival of the emigrant in Queensland, a legal claim to an £18 land order for every member of the family of his servant over fourteen years thus introduced, and a further £18 land order for every two members of the family between the ages of four and fourteen years.

"HENRY JORDAN.

"Queensland Emigration Office, 17, Gracechurch street, London."

I think now, sir, that as I have fully explained the case, I need not take up the time of the House any longer. I shall leave it to honorable members to decide upon what I consider to be a very important question to the country at large, and I have no doubt the case will receive full justice at their hands.

Mr. WALSH said he felt quite sure the Government would not uphold the conduct of their officer, but would acknowledge that in this instance Mr. Jordan had overstepped his duty; and he hoped they would for the future lay down some limit which he would not be permitted to transgress. He thought it was perfectly preposterous that the regulations enacted by the Legislature should be

thus set aside by an officer, who seemed determined not only to dictate to the Government, but to private individuals, as to the labor they should employ. An agreement had been read to the House which could not be enforced, for it was an engagement for two years' services without any reference to the amount of wages; and, he believed, no agreement of the kind was valid unless the exact amount of wages was specified. Whereas, here, the man was engaged at the current rate of wages in the colony, which the Government were to decide upon. Surely, that was a new duty imposed upon the Government by that refractory officer. The honorable member at the head of the Government would probably refuse to accept such a task. He trusted the Government would not suffer themselves to be placed in such a ridiculous, as well as unpleasant, position, and that they would give the House some assurance which would satisfy honorable members on that point. He thought the honorable Colonial Secretary would have tendered some explanation of the matter.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I think, sir, the honorable member for Leichhardt intended the House generally to deal with this question, or I should at once have given the explanation which I intended to make. He certainly comes before this House in a peculiar position, because he does so in reference to a question which has already been disposed of by the Government, as far as that gentleman is concerned, who now constitutes him his advocate. That person appeared, after applying to the Government, to have resorted to the press, who would have nothing to do with him, and, as a third and last resource, he comes to this House. Now, sir, when Mr. Coxen came to me originally, he certainly had some ground of complaint. For, owing to a complication of mistakes—arising out of no improper intention on the part of Mr. Jordan—great irregularities had, no doubt, taken place with regard to the contracts for the hire of immigrants. In the first place, it was not desirable that Mr. Jordan should make any particular terms between the employers of labor and the parties engaging to serve. It was also undesirable, and quite unnecessary for him to draw up a scale of wages, which all persons interested in the question are aware, is totally incorrect. I may say, that at the time I took whatever steps were necessary, and wrote to Mr. Jordan, pointing out to him his mistake, and I called his attention to the fact that the scale of rations he had laid down was quite different to that which is adopted at the stations in the colony—that the immigrants certainly did not receive 3 lbs. sugar; and that in the outside districts, owing to the difficulty in cartage, and other reasons, they did not receive so much as 10 lbs. flour, but that they obtained a larger proportion of meat. I also pointed out, that he had made a mistake, no doubt, quite unin-

tentionally, in making agreements in England for immigrants engaged in this colony. The Masters and Servants' Act says, that any agreement made between employer and employed in Great Britain, shall be as valid as if it had been entered into in this colony, but it does not contemplate any Government interference in regard to the terms of such agreement. Mr. Jordan's intention was a good one; he wished to prevent persons from making agreements on that side of the water, at wages different from those which prevail here. He has, however, overdone it, but this will not occur again; because I have desired him to give every person coming out to this colony all the information in his power as to the current rate of wages here, if he has correct information on the subject, and if not, to withhold it altogether. Mr. Jordan has, I may say, in some respects, under-rated the wages obtainable in the colony. Because, he advertises that shepherds can get £35 or £40 a year, whereas in reality they can, unfortunately, get £100 a year in some of the outside districts. I do not think any blame attaches to Mr. Jordan, and I regret that the matter should have been brought before this House, although the honorable member for Leichhardt, no doubt, thinks he has good reason for bringing it forward. I cannot concur with the correspondent of the newspaper from which the honorable member has quoted, that the immigrants in the northern depôts are so quickly absorbed. He states that "only twelve girls and forty married couples with children," out of the immigrants by the "Maryborough," remained unengaged. The fact is, that it has been almost impossible to get rid of the immigrants by the "Maryborough." No offers appear to have been made to many of them; and I fear that the power to employ labor in Maryborough is limited by the impecuniosity of the district. I can assure the House that the Government have paid a great many hundred pounds for maintaining immigrants by that ship, since they arrived in this colony; and I am seriously thinking that the only thing to be done with them is to bring them down here, where they can get employment, for we cannot really afford to keep them in the depôt. I hope the people in the north, who have now had good notice of the arrival of these ships, will be prepared to hire the immigrants as soon as the vessels come into port; if not, we shall have to come down to the House for a very heavy vote to maintain them. The honorable member is correct in stating that a low rate of wages might be fixed with advantage as the minimum rate to be offered to immigrants in the depôts; and he is not far wrong in saying £20, because the newly-arrived immigrant is not worth more than half as much as the man who has gained some colonial experience. And, I think, if a newly-arrived immigrant gets in the first instance the offer of a com-

fortable roof over his head, and proper provisions, with moderate pay, he has no right to become a Government pauper. The Government do all they can to clear the depôts; but, I believe, if some regulation of this sort is made, it will have the effect of clearing them much sooner. I repeat that I have written fully to Mr. Jordan some months since, and I believe the mistake he has committed will not occur again.

Mr. HALY said he was glad the matter had been brought under the notice of the House, and to receive the assurance of the honorable member at the head of the Government that these mistakes would not be repeated; for he was one of those who had suffered from them. Not that, in his case, the wages he offered were too low, but his agent engaged a man at much higher wages than were laid down in Mr. Jordan's scale. And the consequence was, there was a great deal of mistrust on the part of the immigrant, and he (Mr. Haly) had a great deal of trouble with him. Mr. Jordan's form of agreement set down the wages at £30 to £45, the exact amount to be settled by the Government; whereas his agent had told the man he was to get £52. He had the greatest difficulty to make this man accept a reduced scale of rations, although he was assured that he would get £52 a year. He (Mr. Haly) was very glad to hear from the honorable gentleman at the head of the Government that Mr. Jordan, for the future, would not interfere between the employers of labor, or their agents, and the persons they hired.

Mr. TAYLOR said that, no doubt, Mr. Jordan, though he might be a very good man, and a good emigration agent, was a curious man. One honorable member complained that Mr. Jordan offered the emigrants too high a rate of wages, and another honorable member that he did not offer as much as he was willing to give, so that Mr. Jordan appeared to be a sort of arbiter between the two. He (Mr. Taylor) had seen the agreement which the honorable member for Leichhardt had produced, which was a most peculiar document. He should like to know who was to decide what the wages were to be—between £45 or £65. In fact, he should like to know who gave £65 to a married couple, or even £55, or even £50; for the usual wages for farm couples was £45. Then, it was stated in the agreement, that "a proportionate amount" would be given "for the services of other members of the family who might be employed;" and there was a star at the end of the sentence, which he found referred to a foot-note, in which it was stated that female servants could get from £18 to £25. Now, that was a very unfair way of putting it, because, when married couples went on to a station, some arrangement was generally made to give so much for the service of the family they took with them, and it was not at all likely that the daughter

would get £20 a year as a domestic servant, because the parents would not like to leave her in a town while they went into the bush. It appeared that the agreement bore also a stamp, and it was evidently a printed form issued by the emigration agent. Again, the agreement set forth that the amount of wages was to be settled by the Government authorities on the arrival of the immigrant in the colony. He should like to see the honorable Colonial Secretary, or any other member of the Government, undertaking such a duty. The agreement was a complete deception from the first word to the last. Then, the scale of rations was entirely wrong. He was not aware of any employer who gave 3 lbs. sugar; the ordinary rations were 8lbs. flour, 14lbs. meat, 2lbs. sugar, and $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. tea. It was also stated in the agreement that married couples would be entitled to two full rations. That he denied; in most cases, the wife only received half rations. He believed a full-bodied able man did not actually eat more than 7lbs. flour during the week. Such a document was in every way deceptive; it led intending emigrants to look for a very different state of things from that which actually existed in the colony. He had had no idea that such a document was in existence. He was glad to hear the honorable Colonial Secretary say that he had put a stop to interference in these matters by Mr. Jordan. He (Mr. Taylor) was one of those who had no wish to see immigrants hired in England, except for family or special service; he thought they should be allowed to come out, and then accept engagements in the colony. In reference to the remarks which had been made on the employment of labor in the north, he thought it should be compulsory upon employers in the northern districts to engage married couples, and not to absorb all the single men; and that it would be better if a larger proportion of that class of laborers were imported. He found no fault with Mr. Jordan, although he believed that gentleman did occasionally overstep his duty; and he hoped, therefore, the check and advice he had received from the head of his department would have a salutary effect. He might inform the honorable member for Maryborough that Mr. Jordan had not been sent back to England the last time, so much upon the authority of the Government as by the expressed wish of the House: the Government, in sending him back, had waived their own opinion in favor of the wishes expressed in the House, and he believed they were right in doing so.

Mr. FIRZSIMMONS said it was desirable to give expression to the opinion, that Mr. Jordan should not interfere in matters which were beyond his province. As the Government, however, had taken this matter into their own hands, it was better to leave it there. The honorable member at the head of the Government had stated that there was no demand for labor in the northern districts.

But the fact was, that married couples, who were landed at Rockhampton, had a great dislike to go into the interior, where there was not the same security of life. Reports of murders and outrages by the blacks reached their ears, and they did not care to engage themselves at the out-stations. That was the reason the married couples by the "Maryborough" did not go off so quickly, and not because the market was glutted. There was, in fact, a great scarcity of labor in the north; and he could affirm with perfect confidence, that shepherds in some places were getting as much as £78 a year, which was in itself a sufficient proof that there was a scarcity of labor in the northern districts. He would quote one instance in his own experience—that of a man and his wife, who had been cooking for his superintendent, and receiving £75 a year. They left his service, and the other day he (Mr. Haly) met the man, who wanted him to take him back, because he could only get £30 a year down here. That would shew the difference in the rate of wages. He hoped it would not go forth as a fact, that there was an abundance of labor in the northern districts.

Mr. ROYDS said he could confirm the remark of the honorable member who had last spoken, as to the difficulty of engaging married couples in the interior. He was aware that in his district it was not actually safe for a woman to live on an out-station. It was on that account, and not on account of the expense entailed, that there was a general dislike to take married couples into the bush.

Mr. SANDEMAN expressed himself perfectly satisfied with the explanation afforded by the honorable Colonial Secretary; and, with the permission of the House, withdrew his motion for adjournment.
