

Queensland



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Legislative Council

THURSDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 1866

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Thursday, 20 September, 1866.

Ministerial Statement.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said: Honorable gentlemen—Yesterday, when I made what I might call my *debut* in the Council, as a member of the Ministry, I did not suppose I would be called upon to make a ministerial statement, with reference to matters not within my cognizance, and circumstances that occurred when I was not a member of the Government. It did not strike me at the time, that it was necessary for me to do so; and honorable gentlemen will therefore, I hope, believe that I did not mean any disrespect to the Council, by omitting to do so. If I had seen the matter in the same light as some other honorable gentlemen seem to have seen it, I should have come prepared to make the statement I am now about to make. I have now to apologise to the Council for the omission, and I hope they will receive in good part the statement I have now to make. I thought that all the appointments of the new Ministry having been notified in the *Government Gazette*, honorable gentlemen would have been cognizant of the changes that had taken place, and that, consequently, there was no necessity for me to make a *viva voce* announcement of them. I hope I shall not be required to go back to the time of the first Herbert Ministry, as that Ministry was in existence when the House was last in session. As to what were the motives that induced the succeeding Ministry to leave office, I know nothing more than any other honorable member. I will, therefore, take up the second Herbert Ministry. Mr. Herbert and other honorable members of the Legislature—my honorable friend opposite, Mr. Prior, was one of them—took up the business of the country at a time when it was in a very critical position. That they did so from motives of patriotism, no one can doubt, and I think it will also be admitted that, from their action in the House, they rendered valuable service to the country. After the formation of the Ministry, both Houses were adjourned, to allow of the re-election of those honorable members of the Legislative Assembly who, by the acceptance of office, had vacated their seats. During the adjournment, I have no doubt, consultations took place, in the course of which those honorable gentlemen saw difficulties in the way of their carrying on the Government; and I have no doubt it became apparent to them, as well as it did to me, and to others, that there would be great difficulty in the way of carrying on the Government by that Ministry. During the long recess that took place after the formation of the Ministry, the members had plenty of time for consultation, and, I daresay, the more they looked at their position the less they liked it; and

so they considered it desirable to do something that was likely, or supposed to be likely, to command the confidence of all sections of both Houses. Negotiations, of which I am not prepared to give an account, but which are no doubt well known to honorable gentlemen, took place between Mr. Herbert and the gentleman who now holds the office of Colonial Secretary—the present Premier. The result was, that certain members of the former Ministry agreed to coalesce with members of the Herbert Ministry, and accept office with the view of forming a coalition Ministry. Some of the members of the first Herbert Ministry appeared to be excluded from the present Ministry, but I am not aware of their sentiments on the subject, and as they are not in the Ministry, they are not called upon to furnish me with any statement. One of them is at present on a visit to his constituents for re-election, and I am not prepared to say why he is not in the Ministry. Well, my honorable colleagues having considered that to form a coalition was the most advisable course they could adopt, took the best means they could to form as strong and stable a ministry as possible, and one that they believed would command the confidence of the country. I presume the House will not call upon me to particularise the duties of the several members of the Ministry, but will only require a statement from me, on that point, as regards myself. After the Ministry had been in office for a considerable time, I received a telegram from Mr. Macalister, asking me to accept the office of Postmaster-General. I was absent from home at the time. I was not surprised at the proposal being made to me, for I appeared to be the only supporter of the Macalister Ministry that was in a position to hold the office and represent the Ministry in this House. The honorable gentleman opposite, Mr. Prior, might have had the office I now hold if he had liked to retain it. But he did not choose to do so; and the former Postmaster-General, having resigned his seat in the Council, could not be offered it. Under these circumstances, I was offered the office of Postmaster-General and leader in this House. I felt it was a highly honorable office; and I telegraphed back to Mr. Macalister, asking him if the offer included a seat in the Executive Council, as I wished not to derogate from the position of the House by holding the office on a different footing in any respect from that on which it was held by Mr. Douglas. I received an answer informing me that the offer included a seat in the Executive Council; and I then replied, accepting the office. As to the future policy of the Ministry—we must refer that to the decision of the country; but I may say, in excuse for myself, that I personally am not responsible for the details of any of their measures, as all their measures were settled before I was appointed; but had I been a

Cabinet Minister at the time, I should have made it my business to be acquainted with all the details of the ministerial policy. It was only on last Monday I arrived in town, and, though not formally sworn in, assisted at the Cabinet Council meeting that was held on that day. All the measures of the Ministry were matured before I arrived here; and therefore I trust the House will bear with me if I am not so well up in minor details as I might, under other circumstances, have been.

The Hon. T. L. M. PRIOR said he felt it to be his duty to rise on that occasion and make a few observations on the statement that had just been made, so far as it affected himself. The honorable the Postmaster-General had stated that the office of Postmaster-General became vacant because he (Mr. Prior) declined, after the 31st of August, to carry on the duties of the office. Now, he wished to explain to the House the reasons why he declined to carry on the duties of Postmaster-General any longer. When it was deemed advisable by his colleagues that a coalition Ministry should be formed, he tendered his resignation, but consented to hold the office till arrangements could be made for the appointment of his successor; and, after the formation of the present Ministry, he had an interview with the honorable the Premier, and stated that he would carry on the duties of the office till a successor was appointed. He afterwards left town, and on his return to town, as money had been obtained, he signed cheques for the payment of salaries, and transacted some other business as usual. When he went up to the telegraph office for a similar purpose, he found that the office had been taken from under his control; and he felt, therefore, that he had not been treated in a way he was entitled to expect, nor, being a member of that House, as he ought to have been treated. He at once called upon the Under Secretary, and asked him when a Cabinet Council would be held, and he was informed that a meeting would be held next day. Well, he attended the meeting of the Council and spoke to the present Premier about what had taken place. Mr. Macalister apologised to him for making the change without first acquainting him of it. He then also learned that he was no longer a member of the Ministry, but was only holding the office as Acting Postmaster-General; and he stated to Mr. Macalister that he considered he had acted very uncourtously towards him. It also appeared to him that that gentleman thought he wished again to be appointed permanently in connection with the Post Office; and he told him that if he thought so, he begged to inform him that he had already declined that office, and also, that if he thought he was holding the office with the expectation of being asked to join the present Ministry, he desired very plainly to tell him that he had no wish to join

any Ministry of which he was the head, and that, under the circumstances, he (Mr. Prior) had better leave the Post Office at once. Mr. Watts, however, who was present, asked him not to leave; and, as he felt nothing like temper in the matter, he said he would remain till the first of the month; but he declined to remain in office longer, or to take his seat in the House as the representative of the Government, unless he was in a position at the same time to inform the House who was to be the Minister for the department.

The Hon. W. Wood said that after the speech honorable gentlemen had just heard, he should feel inclined to answer the speech made by the honorable the Postmaster-General; and he must say that he could only characterise the speech that had been made by the present Postmaster-General as very vague and very lame indeed. He could hardly see that the honorable gentleman had informed the House of anything, but that after the receipt of two telegrams he was prepared to join a Ministry of whose policy he knew nothing, and of whose policy he, as yet, knew little, if anything, in addition to what he knew then. He thought that very little courtesy had been shewn to the honorable gentleman by the Ministry, in their asking him to join them without their informing him as to their policy; and he thought the honorable gentleman was, himself, wrong in consenting to join a Ministry without knowing what their policy was to be; and the honorable gentleman was so far distant from Brisbane that he could not know what was the policy of the Ministry until the day before the re-assembling of the House, and, therefore, some time after he had consented to accept office. But what he would like to know was, how the members of the late Herbert Ministry came to be gazetted out of office without their knowledge. The gentlemen who held the offices of Postmaster-General, Attorney-General, and Colonial Secretary in the late Ministry were, he believed, gazetted out of office, and they had not the remotest knowledge of it till they received copies of the *Gazette* in their respective offices. Those three gentlemen had no conception that there was a coalition Ministry formed till then. He was not positive as to the late Postmaster-General, but he knew that the late Colonial Secretary and the late Attorney-General had no intimation of it.

The Hon. T. L. M. PRIOR explained, that though he was not actually aware of the change till he was gazetted out of office, he was a party to the arrangement and gave full authority, so far as he was concerned for that being done. He had, therefore, no cause of complaint on that account.

The Hon. W. Wood: Well, he might be mistaken in one little point of fact, but still the principle, which was what he objected to, was the same. What he complained of was,

that the usual courtesy on occasions of a change of ministry had not been observed in the cases he had referred to; and the members of the new Ministry were sworn into office before their predecessors were gazetted out of office. Now, he expected that the honorable the Postmaster-General would have informed the House as to how that came to pass. Perhaps the House might be told that the real reason of the change of Ministry was the defeat of the late Attorney-General at Ipswich, on the occasion of his seeking re-election, and also because the gentleman who was at the head of the Ministry wished to leave for England; but at any rate he had hoped that the House would have been informed of it. He should have preferred, also, that the honorable gentleman representing the Government had informed the House as to what was the policy of the Ministry. There were two members of the late Ministry in the present Ministry; but they were liable to be out-voted by the other members. He could hardly understand how, as in this colony, and in New South Wales—contrary to what was the practice in the colony of Victoria—Executive Councillors retired when they ceased to hold office as ministers, Mr. Raff continued to be an Executive Councillor. He was glad to hear that Mr. Raff, before the Premier appeared before his constituents for re-election at Ipswich, attended a meeting of the Executive Council at which the Premier himself was present, and that he offered to resign as a member of the Executive Council, but was asked not to do so. Therefore, when the Premier made his statement before his constituents he must have suffered from a great amount of blindness. He was extremely sorry that the party who were last in power went out in the way they did; and he would like to know if Mr. Raff had now a vote in the meetings of the Executive Council or not, because, if he had not, the contract had been entirely violated. He was sorry there should have been a coalition at all; but he thought that, when it was agreed there should be a coalition, some of the members of the late Ministry should have remained in office and have asked the gentlemen on the other side consenting to a coalition to join them, so that they might not have been in the position of giving way altogether. As it was, political parties here had now become the laughing-stock of the other colonies, because they allowed it to appear that they had but one man who was able to form a ministry, and that all parties were bound hand and foot to him as the inevitable Premier. As to the policy of the Ministry, all that was known about it was that the Ministry had submitted certain Bills proposing new duties, and that there were certain other measures to be proposed that were prepared by the Ministry that preceded the late Herbert Ministry. Indeed, he might sum up the policy of the present Ministry

by saying that it consisted of a series of schemes to raise money. The Ministry found that a certain amount of money was wanted, and the Legislature was to be called upon to provide the amount required. Now, instead of a policy of extreme taxation, he would wish to see a policy of extreme reduction. He would like, in particular, to see the railway works stopped as far as possible. If expenditure on those works could be stopped, that was the real and proper thing to do. He should have been in a position to bring up the report of the Select Committee on Railways before this time, but that other members of the committee took advantage of the long recess to leave town, and he could not, therefore, obtain a quorum. However, he would be in a position to bring up the report next week; and it would then be seen that the contractor for the Warwick railway—he thought he should not be exceeding his duty as chairman of the committee, in making a certain statement, as the House would be in a position to know—

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he must protest against the honorable gentleman communicating anything he might have come to know as a member of the railway committee, until the report was laid upon the table of the House. He believed it was contrary to the rules and practice of Parliament, for any honorable member to do so.

The PRESIDENT: The honorable member would be quite out of order, in stating anything that had come to his knowledge, as a member of a select committee, before the report was laid upon the table.

The Hon. W. WOOD: Well, he would only state what he had heard out of doors, and that was, that the present contractor for the Warwick railway was prepared to bring his plant from Allora to Ipswich, and make the railway from Brisbane to Ipswich, at the schedule of prices at which he had contracted to construct the Warwick railway. The sum of £38,000 had been spent on that line, up to the present time; and the contractor was prepared, if his offer to construct the line between Ipswich and Brisbane were accepted, to put the Warwick line in such a condition that it would sustain no damage. The contractor was prepared to begin the Brisbane and Ipswich line in a fortnight, and he was so convinced that no damage would occur to the Warwick line, that if any did take place, he would bear the expense of it. He was, comparatively speaking, able to employ but a small number of men at present, only 400 instead of 800, and was receiving only £4,000 a month instead of £7,000. The Warwick line was to have been finished by the first of September next, but at the rate at which the contractor was enabled by the Government to carry on the work, it would not be possible to finish it in three years hence. If the contract could be got rid of altogether, he

would say, stop the work ; but if the terms of the contract were so stringent that it could not be got rid of, the best thing to do was to accept of the offer of the contractor, and go on with the construction of a line that would pay from the day it was opened, instead of going on with a line that would never pay. He knew that the line from Allora to Warwick was not touched yet ; and if a certain amount of expenditure would have to be gone on with under the contract, why not go on with the Ipswich and Brisbane line at once ? If this line were constructed, a great amount of expense in dredging the river could be saved. He should like to state, with regard to the formation of the present Government, that he could not understand how the honorable the Postmaster-General could only make out that there were but six Ministers, as the honorable gentleman had stated, in reply to one of the questions he had put to him that day, that Mr. Raff was gazetted as a Minister without a portfolio ; and he had not been gazetted out of the Ministry yet. Now, he maintained there were seven Ministers ; but even if there were only six, there ought to be another with a seat in the Legislative Council. It was very well known that the late Colonial Secretary was offered the office of Postmaster-General, but he did not accept it before standing for re-election. That gentleman was, however, to have been offered it on his return from the Kennedy District, in the event of his being defeated. Now, it was extraordinary that almost as soon as it was known he was re-elected—two days afterwards—the office was given to another. A telegram was received, stating that Mr. Dalrymple had obtained a majority of thirty votes ; and three days after, the notice in the *Gazette* was published that the honorable gentleman opposite had accepted the office of Postmaster-General. Now, he must say that he considered the explanation made by the honorable the Postmaster-General, relative to the movements of the Ministry during the period that had elapsed between the time the House adjourned and the time it resumed, was not satisfactory ; and he was not satisfied with the answers given to his questions respecting the absence of Ministers from the seat of Government during a most critical period. The Treasurer might have been absent for good and sufficient reasons ; and there was another honorable member of the Ministry who had particular reasons of a personal nature for being absent, but the answer to his question as to the absence of the Premier was not courteous, to say the least of it. The honorable the Postmaster-General was not in a position now to say what would be the course adopted as to the Treasury Bills Bill, and the Treasury Notes Bill ; but he hoped the next time the House met, the honorable gentleman would be able to inform them whether there was likely to be any material reduction of expenditure.

He hoped that some steps would be taken to see that the excessive railway expenditure was reduced, for he thought it was the railway expenditure that was the sole, or at least, the principal, cause of all their present embarrassment. If they were to have that expenditure decreased, he would be happy to see any measure forwarded for the purpose of providing money, but unless he had a complete guarantee, that in proportion to the increased taxation there would be a corresponding reduction of expenditure, he should oppose all measures for increased taxation. He should now only say, that on a future day, he would draw the attention of his honorable friend to some of the answers to his questions, and see whether he could not get something more satisfactory. The honorable gentleman concluded by formally moving the adjournment of the House.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said that upon the question of adjournment he did not intend to reply at any great length upon the very discursive speech his honorable friend had delivered himself of. As to coalitions, he did not mean to go into precedents for a justification of the coalition Ministry that had been formed here. He would only remark that a coalition Government for selfish purposes was a very bad thing, while a coalition formed from patriotic motives was, on the contrary, a very good thing. With respect to himself, he had only to say that he had long been an adherent of the policy which he believed had been advocated by the present Premier. The land policy of the Premier and his own were identical ; but that was not the question of the present time. He and his honorable colleagues had agreed to sink all differences as to the land policy, in order to carry out a financial policy by which they hoped to relieve the colony from its present state of embarrassment ; and he might satisfy honorable gentlemen that such was the case, by stating that he used every endeavor to secure the re-election of the honorable member for the Eastern Downs. With respect to the policy of the Government, it was at present merely one of taxation ; and everything that could reasonably be done would be done to get the country out of its present financial difficulties. The honorable the Treasurer was, he thought, the best man they could have in that position at the present time. In the management of his own affairs, he had shewn himself to be a good financier ; and out of the colony he had a large influence in monetary circles. At the same time, he must say that he did not agree with him on the land question at all. Indeed, he differed with him on that point *toto calo*. But the members of the Ministry had agreed to sink their differences in that respect to assist in getting the colony out of its present difficulties. He thought it extremely improbable that the honorable the Treasurer would hold office for any great length of time ; and he knew that the honor-

able the Secretary for Public Works had made arrangements which would render it impossible for him to hold office for any long time. As to the other members of the Ministry, they were all disposed for the present to waive their opinions on the land question, and to direct their whole attention to the pressing necessities of the colony. His honorable friend opposite did not observe a very lucid order in his speech, and therefore he was at some difficulty in following him. The honorable gentleman did not seem, by his remarks, to be aware that the Executive Council here was somewhat like the Privy Council at home, and that a person might be a member of the Executive Council without being a member of the Ministry. The honorable gentleman had talked about the Cabinet Council, and he would not refer him to such an authority as "Hallam" on that subject, but would recommend him to the second volume of "Macaulay," where he would find that the cabinet council was only of modern existence, and that it was a council wholly unknown to Parliament. It had no existence at all before the time of William the Third, and it was not only not recognised by Parliament, but was unconstitutional in its nature. Now, there were many members of the Privy Council who were not members of the Ministry. For his own part, he had made it a condition of his accepting office that he should be a member of the Executive Council, not from any personal considerations, but in order that he might not forego any of the rights and privileges of the Legislative Council. On that ground, and on that ground alone, he stipulated that he should be admitted into the penetralia of the Ministry. There was no constitutional necessity that the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be a member of the Cabinet Council, but it was the practice for him to be so. Therefore, he thought his honorable friend was not displaying his usual acumen in objecting to Mr. Raff not being gazetted out of the Cabinet Council, for he never was gazetted into it. He conceived that his honorable friend was not acting fairly, in sneering as he did at the honorable the Premier. The honorable gentleman made those remarks in the absence of the honorable the Premier,—remarks which, if they were made in his presence, as the honorable gentleman was quite well able to take care of himself, he would no doubt sufficiently answer. If the remark had been made in the other House, that the honorable the Premier was held up as the inevitable minister, that gentleman would be able for himself to shew why he was inevitable—if inevitable was to be the word used. For his own part, he thought the Premier was very properly in the Ministry; and if he was inevitable it was because he was a gentleman of such ability that it would be too dangerous to have him in opposition. The honorable gentleman had spoken about extensive reductions—and he must here apologise to the House for being so discursive,

but he could not avoid being discursive, as he must follow the order of the very discursive speech of the honorable gentleman who spoke *de omnibus rebus, et quibusdam aliis*. Now, as to the question of reduction, there were several cogent objections at present. A list of reductions might be made out by the Cabinet Council, but could they be carried into effect in the face of the Civil Service Act? by which the action of the Government in the way of making reductions was considerably circumscribed. Though the Ministry had the power to dismiss an officer, they had not the power to reduce his salary. But he knew that the Ministry, if they proposed no reductions, would oppose all increases; and as to the dismissal of officers, that was a matter that would be left to the House. The honorable gentleman next came to the question of railways, and of course the unfortunate Warwick railway was laid under the lash of his tongue to a great extent. The honorable gentleman said the Warwick line would be unproductive; but he differed with the honorable gentleman in that opinion, for he held that it would not only be productive but would be more productive than any other line. It would also tend more than any other line to the settlement of a large district, and from the additional traffic it would bring into the main trunk line, it would be very remunerative. He fully agreed with the railway policy that had been entered upon, and he did not believe that the whole railway system, when completed, would draw a single farthing from the general revenue for interest. He believed that by the carrying of those railways into the heart of the country, the quantity of land that would be taken up and occupied within the next five years, would be beyond what honorable gentlemen would almost believe. He knew there were persons waiting for the passing of the leasing clauses, in order to take up tracts of land along the line of railway, and to invest—not £50, but £5,000; and if those persons had the advantage of forwarding their products by railway, he had not the slightest doubt that agriculture would go a-head very rapidly in this colony. He laid some statistics on that subject before the House some time ago, by which it was shewn that there was more wheat grown in the Warwick district, than there was in the whole of the colony besides. Now, the cultivation of wheat was increasing in the Warwick district, and all that was wanted was a cheap and rapid means of bringing the produce to market. He had no doubt that the railway in that direction, would exercise a most beneficial influence. He was one of those whose interests were bound up with the growing prosperity of Queensland, and he hoped to see it progress. He looked upon this country in a different light from what some other honorable members did. All his property was here, his children were here, and all his interests were bound up in the

colony. He was not one of those who had invested money in a station along with some other partner, and who took turn about to squeeze as much out of the station as possible and go and spend the money elsewhere. He was not like some, who drew as much money out of the colony as possible, and spent it in England and other parts of Europe. He had nothing to look to, but the prosperity of the colony. He might not live many years, but he would like to see the course of prosperity of the colony begin as soon as possible; and if he could put one of his sons into the occupation, under the leasing clauses, of five thousand acres of land, he would feel that he had placed him in a good position of life. As for squatting, it was altogether beyond the reach of small capitalists, like himself; but farming came more within the reach of his means. Now, he maintained that the Warwick railway, when completed, would be one of the most powerful civilizing influences that could be brought into operation; and he therefore approved of its being completed as speedily as possible. As to the value of a railway between Brisbane and Ipswich, it was not to be compared with the value of a railway to Warwick; and, so far as comparative advantage and benefit was to be considered, the money for the construction of a railway between Brisbane and Ipswich might as well be thrown into the sea; and he had been told that it would only be in the matter of passenger traffic that a railway between Brisbane and Ipswich would pay. He thought it was the greatest mistake that had been made in all previous legislation, that sufficient attention had not been given to the settlement of population on the agricultural lands of the colony—that their policy had not been directed to the establishment of the population that was now seen starving on the ironbark ridges between Ipswich and Brisbane, upon the rich table lands of the colony.

The Hon. W. WOOD: Darling Downs.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: Yes, the Darling Downs; for he believed that was the most suitable district in the colony for the growth of cereals; and he believed that if six years ago their policy, instead of being directed to the granting of bonuses for cotton and grants of land for the production of sugar, had been directed to the encouragement of agriculture, this colony would now have been exporting large quantities of flour instead of being dependent for its supplies of that article upon importations.

The Hon. W. WOOD said he was perfectly satisfied with the explanation that had now been made by the honorable gentleman. He had learned a good deal from him in his second statement—more, indeed, than he had expected. He would now withdraw the motion for adjournment.