

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

THURSDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 1866

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Thursday, 27 September, 1866.

Appointment of Members.—The New Houses of Parliament.—Leasing Areas Bill.

APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS.

The Hon. W. WOOD, pursuant to notice, asked the Postmaster-General—

Whether the Government have any intention of appointing any gentlemen interested in the northern districts of the colony to seats in this House.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL, in reply, said—Seats in the Legislative Council have been repeatedly offered to gentlemen connected with the northern districts (see “Votes and Proceedings” of the Legislative Assembly for 1865, pages 395 to 397), who have either declined to accept, or resigned them after a short time. At present, one of the most distinguished members of the Council owes his position to his former connection with the north. The Government are most anxious to appoint gentlemen from the northern districts, but are unable to suggest any such person to the Governor for nomination who would accept the position, or attend to its duties.

The Hon. W. WOOD said that his honorable friend was correct, in substance, but not in his facts. What took place in the Legislative Assembly he did not know, as he was not a member of that House, but he was correct in saying that the present Government had not had any names submitted to them, because the Government of late had changed so frequently. But during the last two years the names of several gentlemen had been suggested, and before Mr. Douglas left, he (Mr. Wood) told him the names of two or three gentlemen in the north who were perfectly willing to serve, and he, Mr. Douglas, had promised to bring them before the notice of the Executive, but he had not done so. He (Mr. Wood) was prepared to name half a dozen gentlemen who were willing to serve. The Government gave them, on all occasions, the same stereotyped answer. The fact was, that some long time ago they asked some persons to be members of the Council, and they refused to serve; since that the Government had never made any attempt to get any members except from Brisbane or the Darling Downs. He should be perfectly willing at any time when another vacancy occurred, to submit the names of

several gentleman whom he knew would serve if appointed.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL, in reply, said that he and his colleagues would be happy to give due weight to any suggestions which the honorable member might make. They had given the matter their most anxious consideration, but they could not find the names of any persons in the north who were willing to serve. Some who had undertaken the duties for a time afterwards gave them up.

THE NEW HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT.

The Hon E. I. C. BROWE moved the resolutions standing in his name :—

1. That in consequence of the present financial state of this colony, it is desirable that all further expenses, beyond what is necessary to secure the work, in the Houses of Parliament, be suspended.

2. That this resolution be sent to the Legislative Assembly for its concurrence.

It seemed to him that the resolution was consistent with common-sense and common prudence, and could not fail to meet the approbation of the House. He could not for a moment suppose that it would not meet with the support of honorable members present. He might state that the Government themselves had already come to a similar resolution; it would, therefore, require no effort of oratory on his part to ensure its success. But he had no great faith in the success of a resolution passed by that House. In his earlier parliamentary career, he might have been satisfied with having passed a resolution; but he recollected that on a former occasion a resolution of that House, that no further expenditure was to be undertaken in respect to railways, had been contemptuously set aside, and by the very next mail, tenders were sent for, and the whole thing was gone into; so that with the recollection of that fact before him, he could not rest satisfied with merely having the resolution on the minutes of the House. He should be glad to have added to that resolution, that all the large public works, including the railways, should also be stopped. His honorable friend opposite, the Postmaster-General, shook his head; but he was not going to propose it. It was said that, having already spent a certain sum on the railways, it was desirable that they should spend more, in order to make that productive;—for his own part, he had no faith in it at all. They might, when the railways were finished, perhaps, get two per cent. on moneys which they had borrowed at ten per cent. If that was re-productive work, he hoped the colony would be satisfied with it. But he believed the new Houses of Parliament, which they were told would be completed for £18,000, could not be said to be re-productive work. For his own part, he did not believe that they would be completed for double that amount, and that by the time they were finished and furnished,

that amount would run up to something like £60,000 or £70,000. He hoped the Council would support that resolution, and that instructions should be given to the Colonial Architect to secure the works from injury from the weather, and that all the rest of the works should stand over until they were in a better financial position. They would be able to complete it at some future time; in the meantime it would stand a monument of their folly. He did not know whether even that might not be regarded by some as re-productive work, because one of the great schemes in connection with the building was, that when it was erected the land on which the present Parliament Buildings stood could be sold; but he did not think that, in the present state of the money market, they were likely soon to find any purchaser. It would be desirable, therefore, to let that stand over until better times arrived—that happy time so glowingly alluded to by his honorable friend, the Postmaster-General, when he was to occupy the position of a Patriarch on the Downs, sitting under the shadow of his own vine and his own fig-tree, and surrounded by his flocks. He was sorry, however, that his honorable friend had limited the duration of that happy period to only five years.

THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL: He was not going to oppose the resolution which had been proposed by his honorable friend opposite, who had accurately shadowed forth the resolution which the Government had come to with reference to the Parliamentary Buildings. He regretted very much that there should be any necessity for taking such a step; and that his honorable friend should have so much reason to say that those splendid buildings would stand as a monument of their folly. He always had been of opinion that they were going too fast in erecting such buildings, although he did not, as a private member of the House, protest against it. He trusted that abler financiers than himself had well considered the matter, and that all would be right. But as the Government had determined to adopt the course of suspending the works for the present, he should like to have their hands strengthened by a resolution of that House. He, therefore, cordially supported the resolution. He should have said no more on that occasion, had not his honorable friend travelled out of his record by referring to the resolution of the House in reference to the railway. He alluded to this, not as a Minister, but as a supporter of the narrow gauge railway. The resolution was to the effect that further advice should be taken before the narrow gauge was adopted. He considered the narrow gauge to be the most triumphant success ever introduced into any colony; but, at the same time, he by no means intended to say that the Government did not act injudiciously in extending the railway to so great an extent as they had done. If they could only sit down without

incurring any further loss than the expenditure they had already incurred, he would be induced to support the motion suggested by his honorable friend to stop the further progress of the works. He thought it would not be advisable to enter into any further contracts; and he believed it was the intention of the Government to carry the line no farther than Allora at present. That as so much money had been already expended in carrying ballast and other materials on the other portions of the line, it would be advisable to complete that portion of the works as speedily as possible, in order that the money expended already should not be lost to the colony. To return to the Parliament Houses, the walls and roof were nearly complete, and the materials for covering the roof were at present in the Bay. He thought it would be short-sighted economy to endanger the safety of the walls for the sake of a few thousand pounds. The Government merely proposed to put the building in a safe condition; and as all the materials were obtained, the only money required to be spent would be for labor. Under those circumstances, the Government intended to complete the roof, but to incur no further expenditure at present.

THE HON. W. WOOD: He thought his honorable friend was too sanguine as to the effect of a resolution of that House. They had had experience before as to the manner in which their resolutions had been treated by the Government of the day. There was a resolution of that House in reference to this very building, which was treated with the utmost contempt by the Government of the day. With regard to the other resolution which the honorable mover of the present resolution had got passed, in reference to the railways, it was treated with worse than contempt; because, instead of being dealt with in another place on its merits, the previous question was moved, and the matter dropped through. He trusted that the honorable gentleman who represented the Government in that House would take care that any resolutions they passed would meet with proper attention. Although he felt inclined to support the resolution, on the ground of economy, he should feel bound to vote against it for other reasons. If they could not afford to have a better place to meet in, they must remain where they were. The new Houses of Parliament, instead of being an ornament to the city, were the ugliest buildings he ever set eyes on, with the exception of Government House, which was still worse. He very much regretted that they had such a building, judging of it as it appeared at present, and if it did not alter very considerably for the better when completed, instead of being an ornament to the city it would be an eyesore. Better plans had been offered to the Government, but they were rejected. The reason why he could not support the resolution was because there was an Act passed to erect the Parliament Buildings,

and the money for that purpose was to be obtained from land belonging to the Imperial Government, which had been handed over to the Government of the colony. The second clause of that Act said that all the money derived from the sale of this land was to be devoted specially to those buildings; there was, therefore, no saving whatever in not going on with the work. If he was to understand from the Postmaster-General that certain portions of that land had been sold, and that the Government had taken the money, as they took the Savings Bank money and other money, and appropriated it for the revenue, they had done very wrong. If the resolution went only to the length of saying that no money should be spent upon those buildings, except what was provided for by the sale of those lands, he would support it. The money could not be appropriated to any other object but to the erection of those Houses. He contended that, so long as there was land to be sold, the money might as well be spent upon the Houses of Parliament as not. He considered that it was the duty of the Government to carry on the work as fast as they found an opportunity of selling the land to advantage. If £18,000 were required to complete the buildings, they had better sell the land, and as that money could not be used for any other purpose by the Government, he should be unable to support the resolution as it at present stood.

THE PRESIDENT: The question before the House was one which he could not allow to pass without expressing his opinion, though he could not record his vote. The honorable mover of the resolutions said they were dictated by common sense and common prudence; but he (the President) believed them to be the very opposite of both. He thought it would be equivalent to allowing at once that they were passing under the Caudine forks—that they were going through a state of bankruptcy—if they shewed by their vote that they were afraid to carry on those works to a conclusion. What an insult it would be to the Legislature to say, "There is a monument erected to your folly." Were the Council prepared to cast upon their predecessors a reflection of so grave a nature? Could they say to them, "You ought to have foreseen that the money markets of the world would have become deranged?" Such a state of things was owing to the mutability of human affairs. But were they to assume that a change for the better was impossible? Were they to believe that they had arrived at such a state of things that the accumulated capital of the colony had become so small, and its resources so limited, that they could not meet an expenditure of £18,000 to complete these buildings? He was sorry to hear from the Postmaster-General that it was the intention of the Government to stop the works. No doubt, the present was a time of general financial difficulty. They had not only the

difficulty of providing money to carry on the public works of the colony, but also of providing employment for the immigrants who had been brought out at the expense of the Government. If they got rid of the financial difficulty in the manner proposed, they must remember that the political difficulty would meet them on the other hand of providing employment for those who would be thrown out of work. During the late disturbances in the city, there were no less than between sixty and seventy of the men employed at the Houses of Parliament sworn in as special constables to preserve the peace. Were these men to be thrown out of employment? With respect to the financial difficulties of the colony, they were told that ample arrangements had been made to meet them; at all events, they had been passing measures through the House to provide funds in the Colonial Treasury; and it was hoped that they would be effectual for that purpose. Any change for the better in the money markets of Europe would remedy all the evils which surrounded them. The honorable member thought that the works on the railways should not be stopped on account of the large amount of money which had been already expended upon them. He (the President) did not see why, by parity of reasoning, the same argument should not apply to the Parliament Buildings. But honorable members should recollect that there was not only the actual expense which had been incurred to be taken into consideration, but also that within the storehouses of the building there were large quantities of wainscoting, lining, doors, and windows, and the like, all in a forward state of preparation. He supposed that these would suffer material damage, and would lead to a great waste of money, if they were left aside for some length of time without being used. It would, no doubt, have been a very proper question to have raised some time ago, whether they should have commenced the new buildings or not. If that had been done, he should, under present circumstances, have joined heartily with the honorable member in deprecating any such expenditure. But it had been adopted by a previous Parliament, and a large amount of expenditure had been incurred. But now they despaired of the future position of the colony, and shewed that despair by being frightened at the amount of expenditure. He was sorry that he was not able to record his vote on this question before the House. If it were only the convenience of the two assemblies that was to be considered, it would not matter much if they did not remove; but taking into consideration all the various offices connected with the Parliament, it was desirable that they should go into more commodious quarters. It might, perhaps, be desirable that the ornamentation of the new buildings should be delayed, and only the

necessary work completed. Honorable members should bear in mind, also, that the building in which they were assembled might at any time be burned down; and although there was at present a more plentiful supply of water, yet they should not forget that the other side of the street was very lately destroyed by fire; and as the building contained many records, the destruction of which would be a great loss to the colony, it was desirable that they should be removed as soon as possible to a place of greater security.

The Hon. J. F. McDougall: It appeared that the Government had already determined, without any resolution of that House, upon stopping these works. The resolution would merely have the effect of strengthening their hands. It appeared from the statement of the Honorable Mr. Wood that the money provided for that purpose was derived from a particular source, and that it could not be appropriated to any other use; but the probability was that the money to carry on the work was not forthcoming, consequently the work must stand still. The present building, as he had always contended, was sufficient for their purpose, and quite good enough, as a gentleman had stated in another place, for those who met in it. He had been always opposed to that expenditure as being quite beyond their means and the requirements of the colony; therefore, he did not think the Government would do wrong in suspending the works. They did not ask the Government to do so for any particular time—they did not ask them to do so for ever; but if, when the House met next year, the country was in a better position the works might be resumed.

The Hon. G. Harris: He could not take the view of the honorable gentleman who had addressed the House in favor of the resolutions, particularly as it was always understood that they were to be completed from the sale of lands in various parts of the city—in Elizabeth street, in Edward street, and the block of buildings, a portion of which they were at present occupying. There was another objection to it: they were all aware that a short time ago numerous works throughout the colony were suddenly stopped, and that great evil had resulted therefrom. For that reason he should oppose the resolutions, and should record his vote against it.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: He rose to say a word in explanation. Those resolutions were not brought forward by the Government; but the Government had determined on adopting the course recommended in them.

The Hon. W. Wood: Without the authority of Parliament?

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: Yes; but the resolutions, if passed, would strengthen the hands of the Government.

The Hon. F. E. Bigge: He certainly should support the resolutions, because he

did not believe the money to carry on the works was forthcoming. There was no money in the Treasury to the credit of the building fund; and until money was placed to the credit of the building fund, and that to a large amount, the Government was not in a position to go on with the works. It would be better to roof the building, as his honorable friend had suggested, but so far as the rest of the work was concerned, he certainly thought that no further expenditure ought to be incurred until the money had first been provided.

The Hon. E. I. C. Browne, in reply, said he would first take notice of the objection of the Honorable Mr. Wood, that the House had no power to deal with the question, because a special Act provided the funds, directing that certain lands should be sold and the proceeds set apart for the building of the Houses of Parliament. When he referred to the Act, he certainly expected to have found in it a clause compelling the Government to sell the lands within a certain time, and to devote the money for that purpose, but he found nothing of the kind. It would be very unwise to sell the land at the present time. Honorable gentlemen knew as well as he did, or better, that at the present time it was impossible to sell land, and therefore the Government had come to the foregoing resolution to stop the works. He was sorry the honorable the President could not see that these resolutions were in accordance with common sense and common prudence. The honorable gentleman had alluded to the present state of the money market all over Europe; but he (Mr. Browne) believed that had nothing to do with the financial state of this colony. The fact was, they had been outrunning the constable. He believed that their financial embarrassments had been beneficial to them, as it had brought them all up standing; and they would have been in a much worse position if it had not been for that crisis. They had only to act as private individuals would when they found that they had been going too fast; they had nothing to do but to stop the works for the present, and when the times improved to resume them.

On the question being put, the House divided with the following result:—

Contents, 9.	Not-Contents, 3.
Hon. F. E. Bigge	Hon. G. Harris
" St. G. B. Gore	" W. Wood
" J. C. Heussler	" J. Gibbon
" W. Thornton	
" E. I. C. Browne	
" D. F. Roberts	
" J. F. McDougall	
" J. A. Bell	
" T. L. M. Prior	

The question was resolved in the affirmative, and the resolutions were transmitted to the Legislative Assembly.

LEASING AREAS BILL.

The Leasing Areas Bill was introduced by Message from the Legislative Assembly, and on the motion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL,

was read a first time. The second reading was set down as an order of the day for Tuesday next.

The House then adjourned until Tuesday next at three o'clock.