

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates  
[Hansard]

**Legislative Assembly**

**WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY 1867**

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# E R R A T A. ---

Page 33, column 2, line 46, for "would assist me," read "would 'not' assist me."

Page 69, column 2, line 53, after "by auction," insert "at the minimum of twenty shillings per acre."

Page 70, column 1, line 17, for "cultivate" read "occupy."

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Wednesday, 8 May, 1867.

Address in Reply to Opening Speech.

ADDRESS IN REPLY TO OPENING  
SPEECH.

The Hon. R. PRING: Mr. Speaker—I had expected that, before I rose to address the House upon this order of the day, the explanation promised yesterday by the honorable Colonial Secretary would have taken place.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I did intend to make an explanation; it is contained in a very few words, but I should prefer to leave it over until this question is settled.

The Hon. R. PRING: Sir—I was induced yesterday to move the adjournment of this debate because I had not sufficient opportunity of perusing the Speech, in consequence of not having been sworn in as a member of this House when it was delivered, and also because I had not sufficient time to make up my mind, as an independent member, upon the line of conduct which I ought to pursue. I contented myself with listening to the several speeches made upon the address introduced by the Ministry and the mover and seconder; and I had hoped to find that some member of the present Government would have addressed the House in reference to the matters embraced in that Speech and in the address which, I presume, they themselves concocted. But I was surprised to find that none of them had the boldness to come forward and give the House any intimation as to their proposed policy, and why the policy they deemed it expedient to pursue was not introduced in the Speech or referred to in the address. The only conclusion, therefore, that I can come to is, that no policy exists at all. Having come to that conclusion in my own mind; knowing well the state of the colony at the time of the change of Ministry some months ago, and knowing the state of the colony since that time as it existed after a coalition Ministry had been formed; seeing from day to day great mismanagement, as I believe I have; and having learned from the public prints the contents of the letter of the Colonial Secretary to certain members of the House; and having perused the minute of the Executive published in the *Government Gazette*—all tending to shew the great and important matters in dispute between the then Government and, I might say, the present, and certain members of the House—I come to the conclusion that there must be something wrong, and am extremely anxious that the problem should be solved at as early a period as possible. Now, the question is—Were the Government in the right in the action they had taken, or were the members

who agitated that particular subject in the wrong? I believe that the course which I feel it my duty to pursue should be this: to give the Government an opportunity of defending their conduct, and those members who signed the address to His Excellency an opportunity of explaining their views on the matter, and then after the House has taken the matter into its full consideration, let it decide for itself whether the Government was in the right, and so far in the right then, and have acted so far in the right since, that they deserve not only the confidence of the House but of the public of Queensland. It is not with any view, on my part, of upsetting the present Ministry that I take this course, because, if I had that object particularly in view, I should be the last person to bring forward such a question in a House destitute of my usual supporters. I cannot, therefore, be charged on this occasion with raising the important question as to the degree of confidence the Government possess on any particular view, otherwise, as I have already said, I should have chosen a very different occasion. But, in the present position of affairs, after careful consideration of the matter, I have come to the conclusion, whatever the result of this debate may be, that it is better both for Parliament and the public that it should take place, because it will no doubt bring many facts to the knowledge of the public of which they are entirely ignorant at the present moment. If the House express confidence in the Government, I feel sure that for the rest of the session we shall get on in a better temper and spirit, and the work of the country will be better performed. I know that if the public are not satisfied with the decision at which the House arrives, it will in a very short time express its opinion on the subject. Under all these circumstances, I have thought it best to move an amendment on the address, which I shall refer to at the conclusion of my speech, although, at the same time, for the sake of convenience, and in order that honorable members may not make any mistake as to the line of action it is my intention to pursue, I will state at the outset the nature of the proposed amendment. It is not my intention on this occasion to address the House on any one point particularly. I have no desire, by taking advantage of an isolated act of the Ministry, to press too hardly against them; and I should scarcely wish or even ask the House to express a vote of want of confidence, because I could succeed in proving an isolated act of mismanagement; but would rather invite the attention of honorable members to the general conduct of the Government. Should I succeed in shewing a general mismanagement, then I should look for general support. If I had wished to have taken advantage of any particular act of the Government as a body, or of any particular Minister in the management of his department, which might have

been detrimental to the public interest, I should also have waited a longer time, and have tabled a motion to that effect, and be carrying out the special object which I should then have had in view. I should wish the House at once to enter into the whole question of the state of the colony, as it has existed for some time, and the management of the colony by the Government. I therefore propose, at the end of my speech, to move, by way of amendment, that after the word "Parliament," in the address, all the words be omitted, with the view of inserting the following words:—"We beg respectfully to submit to your Excellency that it is essential for securing satisfactory results to our deliberations, and for the proper transaction of the public business, that the Government should possess the confidence of this House and the country, and we deem it our duty respectfully to represent to your Excellency that such confidence is not reposed in the present advisers of your Excellency." I think, sir, there can be but very little doubt of the effect of that language and the meaning of it. I do not think I can be charged with beating about the bush, or with any special pleading. Having now stated the nature of the amendment, I shall proceed to state the reasons for thinking that amendment should be adopted by the House. In doing so, I shall have to touch upon a variety of topics, all bearing more or less on the subject before the House. Now, in speaking of the present Government, I, of course, see that it has been slightly changed so far as regards its component parts. There may be one honorable member who has joined it recently, and there might be another who was one of the Government who lately resigned. Slight changes have occurred, undoubtedly; but these changes cannot in the least affect the position of the present Government, because the general management of the colony depends, as far as my present argument goes, upon the management of the departments of the Colonial Secretary, the Secretary of Lands, and the department of our lamented friend, Mr. McLean. It will be necessary for me to ask the House to follow me back to some rather distant period, because the mismanagement of the colony, like mismanagement generally, does not come all at once. It has its origin, generally speaking, at an anterior date. I should be sorry to visit the sins and iniquities of previous Governments on the present Government; and therefore I shall only go as far back as will enable me to connect this Government with the mismanagement I refer to. I am perfectly aware that the jocular expressions on my speech refer to the time when I held office under a former Government. I can easily understand that I shall be met by-and-bye with many sarcasms upon the action of that Government; and I think myself, if they can find me, in the course of my remarks, attributing to the present

Government negligence and mismanagement, arising out of the conduct of the Government to which I formerly belonged, those jocular expressions would be very well timed. But, at present, I think they are a little premature. The negligence and mismanagement of this colony, which lie at the door of the present Government, never had its origin in any previous Government to which I belonged. I can go even a little further, if I chose. Two members of this Government belonged to the former Government. If that Government had been guilty of any neglect, and they had contributed to that neglect, why, when they had the power in their own hands, did they not alter the position of affairs? Therefore, if I chose to take high ground, they are doubly culpable, if they saw anything wrong in their predecessors and did not remedy it. Why did they not change their tactics under the leadership of the present Premier? They had had an opportunity of remedying the evils which they must have found out, while I have never had that chance. But, inasmuch as it is not my intention to go so deeply into the matter as to involve the action of a previous Government, I shall content myself with commencing at such a period as I think will free me from any remarks upon their management. Now, the period to which I wish to direct the attention of honorable members is that period of the colony's existence when, for the first time, in consequence of foreign affairs, the eyes of the people became unmistakably opened. I think I can well fix that date at the time when the present Colonial Secretary, in the exercise of his own discretion, thought fit to resign. Whether he was right or wrong in the motives which induced him to resign has nothing, as far as I can see, to do with the question at the present moment. I have no wish to introduce any grievances of old times, unless I find it necessary for my purpose, because the bringing of them forward now would assist me, or conduce to unity or good feeling. I go back to that date, because it was upon that particular occasion the House and the public began to be aware that something was wrong. I might say, argue, or, at all events, contend, with some degree of weight, that on that occasion the then Government did not possess the confidence of this House; it was composed of all who were in the Government of the present time. The present Colonial Secretary was Minister for Lands and Works, for the offices had not then been separated; the present Minister for Lands was Colonial Treasurer; The Attorney-General was, of course, then as now, holding the same office, and our present Colonial Treasurer occupied the very dignified position of Postmaster-General, with a seat in the Legislative Council; but, at all events, he had as much to do with the management of affairs as any other member of the Government. So that we have now before us members of the same Government

who, six months ago, did not possess the confidence of the House. The question, then, arises,—if they did not possess the confidence of the House then, do they now? Have they become good boys since? Have they, by carrying out the Acts of Parliament and obeying the resolutions of this House, contributed so much to the prosperity and welfare of the colony that, although it could not be said at that time that they possessed the confidence of the House, they do now? The course of events which followed were rather curious, because it must have occurred to the present Colonial Secretary that, having resigned, and his colleagues with him then forming the Government, it would be useless for him to submit the Government, as it then stood, to His Excellency for consideration, because he had no hopes of carrying on the business of the country with that Government, and therefore I assume, for that reason, he looked about him for other colleagues. As we well know, he made overtures to certain honorable members of this House, which ended in what is technically called a coalition Ministry; for the members who became the fresh colleagues of the present and then Premier were the honorable member for Western Downs, Mr. Watts, and the late Mr. McLean. I think I am perfectly correct in stating that neither of those gentlemen could be deemed to be—and in effect were not—supporters, at that time, of the present Colonial Secretary; on the contrary, I should feel myself perfectly justified in saying that they were strong opponents of his. The object of the Colonial Secretary in forming a coalition Ministry was to strengthen his position in the House; in other words, not being able to carry on his Government, he resigned at his own suggestion, and then—perhaps for very good reasons—thought fit to invite other members, who carried a certain amount of weight in the House, to join him, and so form a stable Government, with which he hoped to manage the affairs of the colony so that it might recover its prosperous condition, and by his acts and management to really satisfy the public mind. This was the view I myself took at the time the coalition Ministry was formed; and so strong was that view then, that I voluntarily and of my own accord, in order not to throw any impediment in the way of a working Ministry being formed, and in order that the country should have a fair chance, after all the bickerings that had occurred, declined to take office, or to join any Ministry who might be in office. Have my anticipations been realised, or have they not? If the benefits which I expected a coalition Ministry to produce had been realised, I should not be here to-day addressing honorable members on the address, and with the amendment in my hand which I intend to move. But I feel that the Ministry has *not* produced these good results. Even if that coalition Ministry had been

successful, and if it had been a Ministry which ought to receive the support of the House, could not every honorable member in the House fancy my astonishment when, at the meeting of Parliament, I found it had ceased to exist. One member has been removed by death; and the other has thought fit to resign before the House met; and I now face the old Ministry, in whom I had not the slightest confidence at the time of their resignation, and in whom I have an utter want of confidence still. These remarks on the position of affairs I submit to the consideration of honorable members as remarks worthy of consideration, especially when coupled with figures and observations which I shall have to make use of in the course of my speech. Now, the colony, at the time to which I refer, certainly was not in a prosperous condition. Events came upon them unawares; there was great commercial depression and financial disaster. No doubt, a great deal of it was to be attributed to the action of a former Government, of which the present Colonial Secretary and the Minister for Lands formed part and parcel. I may not be able to free the former Government entirely from blame; I will give my reason why. When, as a young colony, we commenced borrowing, it seemed to be such a nice and easy thing that sufficient circumspection was not exercised in the expenditure of the money raised by loan, and the assumed prosperity produced a laxity of action. The Government then were induced to undertake works and do many things which they would not have done if they had looked a little further ahead; or, I might go so far as to say, if they had exercised a proper amount of diligence and care. That *proper amount* of care which prudent men exercise in their business in order to enable them to realise a *competency*, or perhaps a fortune, is the care which the Government ought to, but which, I am sorry to say, they did not employ. I think the country suffered a good deal from these proceedings, and I do not quite free myself from blame in the matter, although my position as Attorney-General, to a certain extent, relieves me of so much imputation; at the same time, I do not wish to screen myself, and am willing to take as much blame as my then colleagues. That, undoubtedly, was one cause, if not the principal cause, of the depression that has overtaken us. The immediate cause of the disaster was the inability of the Government to raise the money they required by loan, in consequence of the state of the money market. Thus a great deal of distress originated which the Government could not really help. No doubt, a great deal of bitter feeling was exhibited against the Government, as was sure to be the case, when that unexpected crisis took place, and, on the whole, we were in a deplorable position. I submit that the course of a new Government would have

been immediate vigilance — aye, vigilance to such an extent that it would almost amount to an impossibility, except something disastrous took place, that the country should retrograde. There was no necessity to go back. The financial position of affairs should have been no worse now than it was then, and there would not have been any want of confidence in the mind of the House or the public if common prudence had been shewn. I may say, for myself, that I have failed to discover any. Now, it is well known to honorable members that after the Government had been formed which failed, and the coalition Ministry to which I have referred had been re-formed, and that after a short recess, Parliament met again. It is quite true that much business could not be done during the short session that followed at that period of the year; but, at the same time, the Government could have taken care, if it had thought fit, to have got the sanction of Parliament for certain acts of expenditure which at that time were considered not to be absolutely necessary. In other words, that although certain works were in progress, and contracts had been taken up for their performance, still the Government, I think, might have asked for the sanction of the House to spend the money when it was raised on loan; or have asked its advice at all events as to the expediency of continuing certain public works, when the House had been previously informed that the contract connected with the works could be put an end to by a clause in the contract — that there was no absolute necessity for the works being carried to completion, as the contract provided otherwise. I think it would have been more expedient during the short recess, for the Government to have consulted the House, and asked what line of conduct should under the circumstances be pursued. Or, if the Government did not think fit to consult the House on such a question, or in respect of such matters — if the Government had sufficient confidence in themselves as to the management of those works, why then their line of conduct was to be regretted. But how much more condemnatory is their conduct when they absolutely defy a resolution of the House, and spend the money when the House had told them not to do it. That act alone stamps them with mismanagement of the public funds to a very great extent, and negligence in respect to the state of the colony; and, more than that, it shews an utter absence of regard to the members of the Legislative Assembly and want of respect to the public of Queensland. In other words, the four gentlemen who, because they call themselves Ministers during a recess when Parliament cannot control their action, set the resolutions of this Assembly at defiance, which were passed for the purpose of economy and retrenchment, and, in the teeth of an express remonstrance, say they will

spend the money. Now, if the Ministry can answer me on that question, and if they can shew me that they were right, constitutionally right, they may get out of that scrape. But I shall not be content with taking the honorable the Colonial Secretary's argument on what is constitutional and what is not; because, if I even considered that the line of conduct which he thought fit to pursue on that occasion, as evidenced by his letter to certain members of the Council, and by his dictum enunciated at the Executive Council Board and published in the *Government Gazette* — if I thought his action on each of those occasions was perfectly constitutional, I should still think that he should have bowed to the will of the House, and to public opinion. It is one thing to act constitutionally, as it is one thing to act legally, but it is possible while acting perfectly legally to act also unjustly, and it is sometimes found expedient, in order to act equitably, not to act strictly legally. There are certain courts established for dealing with matters that are of a delicate nature, and I think it may be considered a delicate matter, when we find a barren exchequer, a loan not raised, and yet the money being spent — and one that should have been dealt with as such, and somewhat perhaps more equitably than legally — more equitably to the Parliament, and to the public of the colony. Now, the facts connected with the position the honorable the Colonial Secretary placed himself in, as I have described, are as follows — and I am sure honorable members will, for the satisfaction of all parties, listen to me and follow me in the course of my argument. Now, I know full well the strong feeling there was amongst honorable members on the subject of the Warwick Railway at the time the Loan Act to provide funds for the construction of the line was before the House; and we all know that the battle was fought night after night till the Bill was carried. Then many honorable members thought that, when the Bill was passed, the expenditure of the money that might be raised under it would be controlled; and, if I recollect right, the honorable member for South Brisbane, Mr. Stephens, tabled a motion on the subject, and it was fully discussed — though I do not think that any resolution was come to. The honorable member, I believe, only desired by the motion to ascertain the feeling of the House relative to the control of the expenditure when the money was borrowed. Well, that was a very proper position for any honorable member who desired economy to be practised to take. But, I find from the records of the House, that at a subsequent meeting, when I had not the honor of a seat in the House, the question was again mooted; and that honorable members were still harping on the question. They appeared to say — "We passed the Loan Bill, it is true, and we felt compelled to follow out the Acts of Parliament and provide the means of raising the

loan, but we did not wish the money when raised to be immediately expended. And, therefore, I find again that on the 2nd of October the honorable member for Maryborough passed a resolution, which was as follows:—

“1. That the present condition of the financial and mercantile affairs of the colony require from the Government and Parliament a reconsideration of those Acts and votes which authorised and provided for the carrying out of extensive unfinished public works.

“2. That to relieve the country from some of the authorised expenditure, which it is now proved it can ill-afford to incur, so much as is practicable of the railway line under construction between Toowoomba and Warwick, and can be agreed upon with the contractor, ought to be discontinued.”

Very well. Now, I cannot conceive a better resolution than that, because, as it must be observed, the resolution itself does not interfere with or infringe any Act of Parliament at all, as I shall shew honorable members by-and-by; but it was a resolution brought forward by the honorable member in a spirit of prudence and economy, in order that this large sum of money, which honorable members on the Opposition side of the House knew well, if it once got into the hands of the Government, would be spent immediately, should not be expended at once, until there had been due deliberation on the subject—that was until Parliament had met again, or should be called together for the purpose of considering the subject. Well, I find that those resolutions, though put and passed, appear, for some reason, to have been objected to; and whether they found their way into the waste paper basket, the same as the memorial of honorable members to His Excellency, asking him to call Parliament together, I cannot tell, but it is on record that those resolutions were considered to be inoperative and ineffective. I did not hear the debate. It may be that the honorable the Colonial Secretary considered the resolutions of no effect. Honorable members again took alarm, and the honorable member for Maryborough again took alarm; but whatever was the cause, I find that honorable members continued harping on the same subject. They continued to feel the same alarm with respect to the Government in the management of the fund; and being possessed of this distrust and alarm, they again on the 16th of October passed another resolution brought in by the honorable member for North Brisbane, Mr. Raff. That resolution was as follows:—

“1. That in consequence of the Government having decided that they could not act on the resolution of this House recommending the discontinuance of the works on the proposed line of railway between Toowoomba and Warwick, because another resolution which was proposed to be the condition of such discontinuance had been negatived, it is necessary that the House

should again give an expression of opinion on the matter.

“2. That in the opinion of this House it is desirable to discontinue said works, and that the Government should forthwith make arrangements in terms of the contract for such discontinuance.”

Now, that resolution bears out what I said, that the contract provided that if the House did not vote the money, the contract should be at an end; and with a full knowledge of that fact, the honorable member, Mr. Raff, had this in view, when he proposed the resolution, that it would not infringe any existing interests. The resolution was a fair and a just one; and what did it propose to do? It proposed to control the action of the Government in the expenditure of the money to be raised by the Loan Bill,—when it was raised. But it is not to be supposed, and it cannot be argued, that a resolution controlling the action, or rather, I should say, suspending the action, of the Government in the expenditure of the money at all interfered with the carrying out of the public works, or with any Act of Parliament providing for the construction of public works, or with the contract itself. Well, if that was the position of affairs at the time, what was the result? Why this—that the Parliament, just before it was prorogued, took every means in its power to compel the Government to be economical, and to prevent the expenditure of the large sum of money that was to be raised by loan; and in the full faith that the resolution, or the spirit of it, would be carried out by the Government, the Ministry were allowed to retain their position as stewards of the Legislative Assembly during the recess—honorable members believing that economy or retrenchment would be the order of the day. Happy men. They went home with the idea that all would be right. But when the Parliament was prorogued, the Government did nothing of the kind they were expected to do. The Parliament being dissolved, honorable members hurried away like a happy set of school boys let loose for vacation, and the Government felt they could do just what they liked. Well, they went to work, and they went to work in a way that alarmed some honorable members again. But the Parliament was not sitting, and they could not bring up the honorable members of the Ministry and call them to account. They could not bring up the honorable the Colonial Secretary, and charge him with malpractices, and state their grievances. No, they could not do that. But they did the next best thing that was in their power. They said to themselves—“Our resolutions are being treated with disregard, and the best thing we can do is to memorialise the Governor to call Parliament together.” Well, it is true the weather was very hot at the time, but the hot weather did not seem to interfere with the ardour of honorable members on the subject; and the result was that they went to work and got

an address to His Excellency asking him to call Parliament together. Now, it was not on mere hearsay that those honorable members came to the conclusion that the Government were disregarding the resolutions of the House, because it will appear on the face of the letter of the honorable the Colonial Secretary in responding to the address. The address was, I believe, framed in temperate language, putting before His Excellency the state of the case, and was presented by a deputation, I suppose, in the usual way. It is not necessary for me to go fully into the question as to all that the address contained. It is sufficient to say that it asked for the Parliament to be called together, and set forth the reasons for it, and set forth strong and urgent grounds why the memorialists thought His Excellency should accede to the prayer of the memorial. The memorial appears to have been in some way referred to the honorable the Colonial Secretary. Whether it was presented quite in the regular routine of official business or not I do not know; but I rather think it was not. However, as we all know, the weather was very hot at the time, and perhaps the memorialists were a little hot, too, on the subject of getting Parliament together. Well, His Excellency acting in the proper way, in the only way he could act in respect to such a matter, referred the memorial, if not to his responsible advisers assembled, referred it to his Principal Secretary, who is supposed to possess the confidence of his colleagues in matters of that kind. That appears to me to be the proper course to follow; and we accordingly find a letter addressed in reply to the memorialists by the honorable the Colonial Secretary. Now, I am unable to discover whether the honorable the Colonial Secretary submitted that letter to his colleagues or not; but I rather think not. At any rate, he could not submit it to all of them, for some of them were in Melbourne at the time, and others were at their stations. And perhaps it may be said it was not necessary that he should submit the letter to his colleagues. However, be that as it may, all the members of the Government must take the responsibility of the statements contained in the letter. His Excellency, acting in a constitutional way, and in the way he had chalked out for himself shortly after his arrival here, and which he published in the *Government Gazette*—by which he submits to his Executive Councillors all matters not directly affecting imperial interests for their advice—submitted this memorial to his Executive Councillors. But his responsible advisers did not recommend him to call the Parliament together because they would not be turned out. They were determined on that. They accordingly advised His Excellency not to call Parliament together. They told him—"We are acting quite constitutionally, and we will stand the racket;" and now they are standing the

racket. I see amongst the names attached to the memorial, besides the names of members of the Legislative Council, the names of several members of the Legislative Assembly—Mr. Raff, Mr. Mackenzie, Mr. R. Cribb, Mr. Edmondstone, Mr. Brookes, Mr. Palmer, Mr. Dalrymple, Mr. Pugh, and Mr. Stephens. However, the honorable the Colonial Secretary did not recommend His Excellency to call the Parliament together. The honorable the Colonial Secretary took this view of the matter, as evidenced by his letter. He says there were two resolutions passed by the House; but he says those resolutions are waste paper. Well, the resolutions may or may not be waste paper, but if resolutions of this House are to be treated as waste paper, I hope I shall see no more resolutions passed by this House. If resolutions are to have no effect—if they are to be treated as waste paper, why have any more of them brought forward and passed—why have them brought forward and discussed for hours and hours and passed, if they are to be treated as waste paper? I look upon a resolution passed by this House as an expression of the opinion of the Legislative Assembly as to the line of conduct that shall be pursued by those honorable members who hold office in the Government. I look upon a resolution as in the nature of an instruction, if not a command—but I should rather think it partook more of the nature of a command than of an instruction of the House. But the argument of the honorable the Colonial Secretary appears to me to be this, that the resolutions were waste paper, and the House had no right to pass them. He says the resolutions were in contravention of Acts of Parliament. "It is all very well," he says, "for the House to pass them, but if I find that if I carried them out I should infringe the law of the land, and if I am put in that position, I conceive that I am not infringing any principle, but rather that I am performing my duty when I neglect to carry them out." Now, if that were his position in this matter, perhaps his defence might be well grounded. But I maintain that that was not his position, and that there is no Act of Parliament in this colony referring to the railway, or the construction of the railway, that interferes, or can be construed in any way whatever to interfere, with the resolutions brought forward by the honorable member, Mr. Raff. A portion of the letter of the honorable the Colonial Secretary, to which I have referred, is in these words:—

"You will permit me, in the outset, to observe that the resolutions you allude to are defective, in so far as, while they do not constitute an Act of Parliament"—

Who ever thought they did?—

"they also fail to shew that they are consistent with Acts of Parliament already in existence relating to the same railway;"—



There is not the slightest necessity they should;—

“for if in the slightest degree they clash with, or render nugatory and inoperative, those Acts of Parliament which have been passed for the making of railways, these resolutions are only what the Minister for Works very properly designate them—waste paper.”

But then they did not clash with Acts of Parliament, or interfere with them in any way whatever; and, therefore, it was a violent assumption on the part of the honorable the Colonial Secretary when he put forward, as his views and thoughts on the subject, that they did. Well, he illustrates the case, but, so far from the case he takes up being a case in point, it is not a case in point at all. He says—

“Take an instance in point. Had Mr. Walsh or Mr. Raff carried a resolution that interest should no longer continue to be paid on our debentures, would any Government be guilty of unconstitutional conduct who refused to carry out such a resolution? Or, take another instance—the very case before us. Supposing Mr. Raff’s resolution, instead of being framed as it is, were so worded as to disclose its true character and bearing, and stood forth without disguise—a resolution to suspend the Loan Act?”—

What an idea—to suspend the Loan Act!

“would any Government be blameable for telling Mr. Raff that if he wished to suspend the Loan Act he had better introduce a Bill for the purpose, and get it passed; and that until he did so no attention could be paid to the resolution?”

Why, the honorable the Colonial Secretary is supposing all manner of things that have no existence. The idea of the resolutions suspending the Loan Act, or interfering with it in any degree whatever, is the height of absurdity; and if any honorable member brought forward such a resolution—a resolution for suspending a portion of the Loan Act—he would be a fool; but no one would be such a fool, for when an Act is passed proposing that a loan shall be raised, it is also provided that, when the loan is raised, you must pay the interest. But the Act does not say that when the loan is raised the money must be expended immediately; or that this House is to be deprived of its privilege of directing when the expenditure is to take place. The resolution is not, therefore, one suspending the Loan Act, or interfering with it in any way, for the Act only authorises the raising of the money—for a particular purpose, I admit, and, in this instance, for railway purposes.—

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Not all of it.

The Hon. R. PRING: No, not all of it; but I am speaking of the portion referring to railways. The Act says that the money required shall be raised by loan; and it is also provided that the money, when so raised, must be applied to the purpose for which it is raised, and any application of the money otherwise would be unconstitutional. In other words, if a resolution were passed proposing that

the money raised by loan for railway purposes should be spent on roads and bridges, or ports and harbors, such a resolution would be bad, and would, no doubt about it, be an inoperative resolution. But the Railway Acts only provide that, when the money is raised, it shall be spent on the works for which it is raised. But the Act does not say that, when you get the money, you must spend it immediately; nor does it say that you must spend it in a week, or a month, or a year. It only says the money is to be spent for the particular purpose for which it is raised. Now, the honorable the Colonial Secretary either mistook the nature of the resolution, or he raised this point as a blind for the purpose of preventing His Excellency calling the Parliament together at that time. Then, as to the effect of a resolution of this House, I cannot see why the honorable the Colonial Secretary can say that a resolution of this House is mere waste paper, when it was by a resolution only of the House, in 1864, that the railways were ordered to be constructed.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: It was under an Act.

The Hon. R. PRING: Yes, it was under an Act. I know all that, but the Act followed upon the resolution proposing that the railways should be constructed. Well, now, that is the conduct of the Government in reference to the address; and the result of that conduct in my mind amounts to this—that the Government felt they had disobeyed the express instructions of the House, and that the sensitiveness of honorable members having been fully raised to the misconduct of the Government, the members of the Government felt that, if they advised His Excellency to call Parliament together at the time he was asked by the memorialists to do so, their chances of holding office much longer would have been very slight indeed. Therefore, they did not advise His Excellency to call Parliament together, and accordingly Parliament was not called together. Now, these are important matters—so important that I have considered it my duty to bring them thus fully before the House; and I can confidently submit to the House this also—that there is not a member of the House that could express a contrary opinion as to its importance. And, if it is as important as I submit it is, why was it not mentioned in the Speech? Why was it smothered there? Why was an opportunity not given for debate upon it? Why was there no explanation made of the conduct of the Government? Why was not an opportunity given to the House, by a full and fair discussion, to arrive at what should have been the conduct of the Government on that occasion, and to say whether it was right or wrong, instead of driving me into the unpleasant position of voting a want of confidence in the Government. The letter of the honorable the Colonial Secretary was

bad enough, because it gave bad advice, unsound advice, and such advice as ought not to have been given to His Excellency. But if the letter was bad, what was the Executive minute on the subject—when all the members of the Cabinet met together? The Cabinet may have a bad head; but I cannot conceive that all the heads of departments are bad heads, or they must be a bad lot altogether. But I have a shrewd suspicion that all the heads were not there; and that all the heads were not represented there. I find in the *Government Gazette*, of the 12th of January, 1867, such portions of the deliberations of the Executive Council on the subject as it suited the honorable the Colonial Secretary to publish. Oh, what would I not give if I had hold of them all! But I have only got a part, though I think the part I have got will suit me. I think it will give me a little inkling as to what took place. Well, we will fancy that the Executive board has met, but I cannot say who were there. The President, of course, was there; and there can be no doubt that the Vice-President was there. No doubt of that. And probably the Postmaster-General was there to make up a quorum—the fag end of the Ministry, the dummy, to make up a quorum. And so we will suppose that the President, the Vice-President, and the fag end of the Ministry formed the Executive Council on that day, when the great interests of the colony were to be dealt with. Well, we find that one of the results was, that it was considered necessary that the public should be informed as to the *pros* and *cons*, and should be informed as to the way they do business at a meeting of the Executive Council. “We will not,” say they, “leave honorable members only to know what are our reasons for not advising His Excellency to call Parliament together. We will not let Mr. Western Wood carry the reply about in his pocket, and shew it to members of Parliament only and his friends, but we will have an Executive meeting, and determine that the letter of the honorable the Colonial Secretary shall go forth, and that the public shall be enlightened.” And very prettily the public have been enlightened, too. Well, this is the curious part of it. They were all old hands at the business who were present. There is a good deal said about duty, but nothing about their own duty to call Parliament together. Well, after going into some matters, which I suppose were perfectly right, and explanations as to what was proper to be done, and the position which the President might be considered to hold in respect to such a matter, it came to this, that the President did not think the matter was one that he should mix himself up in, and accordingly he invited the opinion of the honorable the Colonial Secretary. Yes; that was quite right. The Colonial Secretary accordingly produces his paper and documents, and proceeds to take notes. I find, then, that

the Council deliberate; and a most important fact to be noticed—though, if I had not seen it here, and under the hand of the Clerk of the Executive Council, I should scarcely have credited it—is, that they did deliberate; and but that I know the Clerk of the Council to be a most truthful man, I should not have taken it into my head that they ever did deliberate. But they did deliberate, and then I find this—

“The honorable the Vice-President observes, that in the letter addressed by him on the 26th November ultimo, to several of the gentlemen who have signed the address now before the Council, he fully explained and justified, on behalf of himself and of his colleagues, the policy respecting the Warwick Railway, to which the present Ministry are determined to adhere. The memorialists are requested to refer to that letter.”

Well, even after they had slept on the letter, and after solemn deliberation, the Executive Council adhere to this resolution. But why was it necessary to deliberate when the honorable the Colonial Secretary went to the Council solemnly determined to adhere to his letter? If that was the case what necessity was there for deliberation? But I do not believe they deliberated at all. Now, there is no mistake as to whom the onus rests upon, for the minutes go on to say—

“The Vice-President further recommends the Council to advise His Excellency the Governor to decline compliance with the prayer of the address, on the grounds already stated in the above-mentioned letter, and also for the following reason:—

“1. It is well known that several of the most influential memorialists have always been, and still are, strongly opposed to the establishment in Queensland of parliamentary government.”

Now, I should like to know upon what authority the honorable the Colonial Secretary dared, at the Executive Council Board, to inform His Excellency of that—and I hope the honorable the Colonial Secretary, when he thinks fit to enlighten the House as to his conduct, will be kind enough to mention the names of the honorable members amongst the memorialists who have always been strongly opposed to the establishment in Queensland of parliamentary government; and I hope the honorable members, when they are named, will either have the courage to say they have always been opposed to the establishment of parliamentary government in the colony, and still are, or will flatly contradict the assertion. I should rather think, that this must have been a hasty expression of opinion by the honorable the Colonial Secretary, and one that was not given with his usual acumen. But this is rather startling intelligence to me. It seems to me very extraordinary, that we should have been sitting here for five or six years, and that we should have had to work very hard for our constituencies, and should have had to work hard and be at no small expense in some instances to obtain our seats, and that one, even one, honorable member should have

crept in to oppose parliamentary government, is to me a matter of the greatest astonishment. But I see the way the honorable the Colonial Secretary thinks he is going to creep out of this. He will get up and say, "It is quite true that I used these words with respect to some of the memorialists, but in doing so I referred to members of the Legislative Council." Well, if that was the case, why did he not say so?—why did he not say that he referred to members of the Legislative Council? But the sarcasm of the honorable the Colonial Secretary also refers to honorable members of this House, for he goes on to say,—

"Those gentlemen would prefer to have a single Council,"—

Now, where does the honorable gentlemen get his information? Does he keep a detective, and does he act upon information received? I know that I never could get any information of the kind, but we all know that the honorable the Colonial Secretary is a host in himself. Well—

"Those gentlemen would prefer to have a single Council, entirely, or in great part, nominated by the Crown, instead of an Assembly elected by the people,"—

Well, of course I do not know whether they would.

"and to see all the powers and functions of the Executive concentrated in the sole person of the representative of the Sovereign, instead of being exercised by Ministers responsible to the Colonial Parliament. If there were any doubt on this point, such doubt would be removed by the fact, that—although these gentlemen, alleging that some imaginary privilege of the Assembly has been violated by the Ministers now in office, have carried on for the last six weeks an incessant personal canvassing of the members of both Houses, and an indefatigable agitation through the press and otherwise"—

How did the honorable member obtain that information, I should like to know.

"they have been unable to induce more than thirteen out of the thirty-two members of the Assembly to affix their signatures to the address; and yet they do not hesitate to urge His Excellency the Governor to set his constitutional advisers at defiance in a matter in which purely local interests alone are concerned, and at the instance of a minority of the representatives of the people."—

I do not at all understand in what way it can be said the memorialists set the constitutional advisers of the Governor at defiance; for it is very clear they would not be set at defiance.

"Five of the Ministers are themselves members of the Assembly, and would be the first to defend the privileges of that body, if they had been really in any way infringed."

Then, why should they object to meet the Parliament, if their consciences told them they had done what was right? But I deny

that the consciences of the five Ministers would do so.

"Moreover, it need scarcely be said that no free Government, responsible to the local Legislature, can possibly be conducted with success, unless it be founded on the support of a majority of at least the popular branch of that Legislature."

I should imagine, from this particular phraseology, that the honorable the Colonial Secretary must have known that if the Parliament had been called together at that time, the Government would have found a majority of the House against them; because it is one thing for a number of honorable members to ask the Governor to call Parliament together to debate a question, and quite another thing to expect that they will have a majority. A minority may call for a meeting of Parliament at a critical time, and it is quite consistent with their doing so to find that they are a minority when the House meets. Neither does it follow that the meeting of Parliament should be put off because it is a minority who asks that the Parliament should be called together. A decided majority of members asking for the calling of Parliament together would compel the Executive to call Parliament together; and if they would have had to give way to a majority, why were they not sufficiently gracious to give way when there was only a minority of one?—so close did the numbers run. Now, what is the conclusion that any one would come to on such conduct? Why, that the Government were afraid to meet the Parliament. But to continue from these minutes—

"Consequently, it would be a violation of an important constitutional principle, and an insult to the Assembly, if the Parliament were to be summoned to meet in an extraordinary session, under existing circumstances, and contrary to the advice of the Ministry possessing the general confidence of a majority of that Assembly.

"Whenever Parliament meets, it is the constitutional practice that the Ministers for the time being announce the measures which they propose to bring forward for the welfare and advancement of the community;"—

I wish they had enlightened us a little more on this occasion, and enlightened us as to what were the measures they were to bring forward for the welfare of the country.

"but if the demands of the petitioners were complied with, it would be necessary for the Government virtually to change sides."—

Not at all. Why would they have had to come over here, if they could satisfy the House that they had done what was right. But that paragraph was inserted because the honorable the Colonial Secretary knew that if he did meet us here, he would very soon have to change sides.

"In place of the Ministers, as representing the majority, intimating the course which they intend to pursue, they would have to keep their seats, and wait patiently for the petitioners to announce their views and policy."—

Not at all. That is absurd. Parliament was not sought to be called together for the purpose of honorable members walking from that side of the House to this. Parliament was asked to be called together for the purpose of considering certain matters that were of the highest importance to the colony. The questions that would have been raised would have been—Have the resolutions of the Parliament been violated, and was the Government right in violating them? If so, the Government would have found a majority at their back. The assertions here are as unsupported by fact as anything could be.

"Some precedent ought to have been quoted, to shew how long such a proceeding should last—how long the majority should be expected to await the good pleasure of the minority. In fact, the gentlemen who have signed the address do not constitute even a legal quorum of the Assembly."

I am willing to grant that this was a mistake, for I believe there were sixteen members of the Assembly signed the requisition; and that number was a clear majority.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Not at the time it was forwarded. There were only thirteen signatures.

The Hon. R. PRING: Well, thirteen out of sixteen is a very respectable minority; and, besides, there were three vacancies at the time, and the honorable the Speaker could not, of course, be asked to sign the memorial. But not only was it the members signing the memorial who were treated in this way; for it should be remembered that every one of the constituencies they represented were, through them, treated in this way; and we will soon see how the honorable members of the Ministry will be treated for this by their constituencies when they go before them. Well, at any rate, the memorial was signed by a very respectable minority of members of the Assembly, and they were entitled to far more respectable treatment than was given to them here.

"They could not of themselves enable the House to transact any business. A special session during this month would be very inconvenient, except for those members who reside in or near Brisbane."

Now, this is incorrect. The number of members who signed the petition, might have been themselves insufficient to form a quorum, but it by no means followed that there would not, when His Excellency summoned Parliament, have been a full quorum of members; for it was to be supposed that when His Excellency summoned Parliament, many honorable members who reside at a distance would have felt it to be their duty to His Excellency, as well as to their constituents, to have obeyed—and why did the honorable the Colonial Secretary not leave it to country members to say for themselves whether they would have come or not? Why did he take them all under his wing? I am sure that no one wanted him to do so.

"The petitioners cannot expect that the members of the majority who disapprove of their conduct and policy, would attend, at the cost of much personal inconvenience, to make a House."

Well, I rather think that good, upright, honest representatives of the people would, when there was a matter of such importance to be dealt with, and when the colony was in a state of pecuniary difficulty, have sacrificed themselves so far as to have made it a point of duty to attend. Then comes the next paragraph. We have been living here for five years under responsible government, and yet it is considered necessary to tell us this—

"3. The Governor of this colony acts, according to the constitution, by the advice of responsible Ministers."—

Well, we all know that.

"The Ministers, *as such*, know nothing of the petitioners,"—

No doubt of that; and, what was more, they did not want to know them; for, especially at that time, they were a thorn in their side.

"nor of the subject to which the address refers."—

Well, then, if that was the case, they knew nothing at all. But, perhaps, the honorable the Colonial Secretary, as such, knows nothing; but, as Mr. Macalister, he knows everything. But, if he read the address, how did he not know? and, if he did not know, he should have known.

"Mr. Raff's resolution, on which the petitioners mainly rest their case, was (as has been already stated in the Vice-President's former letter) carried in the Assembly in a thin House, at the end of the session, and only by the casting vote of the Speaker; ten members out of thirty-two voted for it, and it is at variance with the provisions of several Acts of Parliament and resolutions of both Houses."—

I want to know the reason the honorable the Colonial Secretary has for coming to the conclusion that if there had been a full House when the resolution was passed the majority would not have been greater; and I want to know on what assumption the honorable the Colonial Secretary could contend that it was likely to have been rejected if there had been a full House. But whether a resolution is carried at the end of the session, or at the beginning, can make very little matter, so long as it is carried; and I can very well understand why a resolution of this kind is brought forward at the end and not at the beginning of a session. It is brought forward at the end of a session as an instruction to the Government to be observed during the recess. Now, such a thing is not required at the beginning of a session, because honorable members during the session are in a position to deal with any matter when they see occasion.

"This resolution was never communicated in the usual form to the Legislative Council,"—

I do not know why it should, for a resolution of this kind belongs properly to the Legislative Assembly. Although, by parliamentary routine, it is usual to send such a resolution to the Legislative Council, for its concurrence, such a resolution is not inoperative because it is not sent there.

"nor was it ever brought under the notice of the Governor in Council in the only way known to the Constitution—that is, by address from the Assembly itself, while in *Parliament assembled*."

I do not know that it is necessary a resolution should be sent up to the Executive, except such as are agreed to by both Houses, or such as require, for certain reasons, to obtain His Excellency's sanction.

"It is certain that the petitioners are not the Parliament; nor, during a prorogation, are they anything more than private gentlemen."——

Well, this is all of a piece with the rest; but I deny it: and, I ask, is an honorable member of this House, after devoting his energies, day and night, to the business of the country, for several months of the year, to be considered nobody afterwards? Is he a member of Parliament for several months of the year, while he is attending to the business of the country, and as soon as these doors are shut does he cease to be anything more than a private gentleman? If, after a prorogation, we are not members of the Parliament, what are those honorable gentlemen who constitute the Ministry?—after a prorogation, what are they? Partly private and partly public gentlemen, I suppose. I cannot imagine why the honorable gentleman came to insert such a paragraph in this state document. But all that is not enough; and, as if it had been considered that it would not be enough, we have to get a kick at the end of it. After abusing honorable members in every way that he could, the honorable Colonial Secretary winds up by telling honorable members that during a prorogation they are nothing more than private gentlemen. Well, I could understand all that; but I cannot understand this—

"The Council expresses their unanimous concurrence with the Vice-President,"——

I always believed that the honorable the Colonial Secretary was up to a few shifts and quirks more than his neighbors, and that, if there was any one in the colony who could steer the vessel of the state clear of the shoals and narrows, when she got into them, it was he; but I was not prepared for such an approval as that. Well, this is what follows:—

"and advise the Governor, for the reason stated, to decline compliance with the prayer of the address. Further, the Council, observing that the petitioners admit their course to be 'unusual,' are bound to record their conviction that it is entirely without precedent in any self-governing British colony, thus deliberately to endeavor to place the representative of the Queen in the position of an autocrat, upsetting the majority at the instance of the minority of the Legislature,

and arbitrarily intervening in affairs where no imperial interest can, by any possibility, be involved."——

Now, if that is not the finest flourish of trumpets I ever heard! Make His Excellency, the representative of the Queen, an autocrat! I never could have imagined such a thing as a few honorable members going up to His Excellency the Governor, with a small piece of paper in their hands, praying him to become an autocrat. But it was His Excellency's responsible advisers who put him in that position, if he had got into it; and, of course, as they were his responsible advisers, they would have to get him out of it, and get themselves also out of the difficulty they had got in, by placing His Excellency in such a position. What a position for any ministry to be in. Well, the finish of all is this—

"The present difference is obviously a mere trial of strength between contending political parties, and must be decided in the Colonial Parliament during the ordinary annual session."

And then, I suppose, we will be told that the money having been spent on the railway, and the works not being completed, it will be necessary to provide more money; and if we raise any complaint, we will be asked, what is the use of crying out when the money is spent? Now, if honorable members had not taken the course they did; if they had allowed the money to be spent without any resolution or any remonstrance, and if they had complained or murmured when a new loan came to be asked, the members of the Government would have been the first to have asked—Why, if honorable members had objections to the conduct of the Government during the recess, did they not take steps by a memorial to His Excellency to have Parliament called together at an early period, to deal with the question and stop us. But when, under circumstances that occasion alarm, we do take such a course, we get a kick over the left, and are told that we are not gentlemen. Well, so ended the farce. And, I think, I have clearly proved that the Government have violated their trust. That, being merely deputies of the Parliament to carry out the Acts and ordinances of this House, they have failed to do so; or, if they have not, they have said they would not do so. They have violated their trust by acting contrary to the letter and spirit of resolutions passed by this House; and, not only that, but they have refused, by so advising His Excellency, not to give the representatives of the people an opportunity or a chance of checking them in their headlong career. To that portion of my speech, sir, which refers to the conduct of the Ministers in advising His Excellency not to comply with the memorial for calling Parliament together, it is only necessary for me to add, that I thought it my duty to bring the matter before the House, because an opportunity

was offered to us, on the discussion of the address, to enter into that question, and because I thought, and still think, I am correct in the position I have taken, that it is a matter as much affecting the condition of this colony in general as any other that can come before this House. There are many points which I shall bring before the notice of the House condemnatory of the conduct of the Government in managing the affairs of the colony; and if the House should be of the same opinion as myself, in reference to their conduct, that will only add to the strength of my position. Now, it will be in the recollection of honorable members of this House, that at a certain period of the last session of Parliament the public mind, as well as the minds of several members then constituting the House, was greatly agitated on the land question. The then Minister for Lands and Works, and Premier of that time, constantly in the House asserted that there should be a dissolution of Parliament about January; in fact, I think I am stating what is correct when I say that he professed himself to be anxious for a dissolution, in order that the public should freely discuss the land question, and have an opportunity to return those representatives who advocated the principles they desired to see carried into effect. Circumstances prevented the honorable member from carrying out his purpose; but I certainly did expect, when he resumed office, that that promise would be carried out. I cannot conceive that his position was at all specifically altered. If he considered it expedient, when formerly in office, that there should be a dissolution, in order that the country could take into consideration the best way of dealing with the crown lands, I cannot conceive how his opinion should have changed upon his return to office. I thought, therefore, that he would have advised His Excellency to dissolve the Parliament after the transaction of the public business during the recess. The country should have been placed in some satisfactory position, with reference to monetary matters, and then the promised dissolution could have taken place. Indeed, I so much expected that the honorable member intended to dissolve, that honorable members co-operating with me on this side thought it would be best to follow the same line of policy; and if that Government had continued in office, they had pledged themselves to the country that a dissolution should take place in January. Spite of his promise, not only had no dissolution taken place in January, but not a word had been since said by the Colonial Secretary about a dissolution. It might be that he considered, as Parliament would shortly expire by effluxion of time, a dissolution was unnecessary. So far, I would be inclined to agree with the honorable member for not dissolving in January, were it not for a portion of the Speech—the third paragraph. The Leasing Act was passed as a

temporary measure at the end of last session; it was a measure hastily drawn up and introduced by the Government, and one, to my mind, not calculated to benefit the country very much. It was considered best by the House to pass some sort of a law on the subject of the land, and so it was hastily passed, as a temporary measure, pending the re-consideration of the whole subject by the country at a general election. Therefore, I am surprised that a Government of which the honorable member is the head, should attempt again to deal with the lands without a dissolution. Our special attention is invited

“to a Bill which will be introduced to amend the laws relating to the leasehold of crown lands. It is of the highest importance that leasehold, as well as freehold tenure, should be placed on the most favorable footing possible.”

The Bill is to place leasehold tenure on the same footing as freehold tenure! That leads me to the opinion that the Government consider the freehold tenure good—that the Leasing Act is inoperative, and that they will now remedy it by passing another measure for some indefinite period. The whole question is to be dealt with for some time to come; and it will, they consider, be unnecessary to recur to it in the future. I tell them not to believe it. If Parliament is to be dissolved by effluxion of time, why ask this House to deal with the land question at all, either by a Leasing Bill or any other Bill? If it is absolutely necessary that the land policy of the country shall be again discussed, why not have a dissolution *instantly*, and give the public an opportunity of expressing their opinion upon it? I disagree with that paragraph of the Speech on those grounds. But I can perfectly understand—if a dissolution was ever intended—why, when the Colonial Secretary found himself back again in office, he did not want a dissolution. When his position was jeopardised, and he was likely to be compelled to give up office, he was anxious for a dissolution. His talent and political knowledge told him that he must go to the country on the land question, because he thought he would, on that, be secure in a general election of a majority of the Assembly; and because he fancied that public opinion at that time was against pastoral interests, and that it would be all good for him. But with him, like with other public men, the danger was passed, and the thing was forgot. I object to any dealing with the public lands, by leasing or otherwise, until there is a general election and the public express their opinion upon the question. I shall not be satisfied with the statement of the Government that the Leasing Bill is to patch up the present laws. If the Leasing Act of last session was good enough to work for a short period, it is good enough to work for a short time longer.

I have come to the conclusion, that at no distant period, the whole of the land laws of the colony must be reviewed, and that cannot be done until after a general election. Moreover, I find fault with the third paragraph of the Speech, because it refers to the extensive areas which have been proclaimed in West Moreton and Darling Downs; and, inasmuch as they are described in a proclamation issued only a few days before this Speech was written, I take the two documents together, and I say that I object to the Speech, because I disapprove of the conduct of the Government in making those reserves. I assert that the conduct of the Government is not that of a Government who command the confidence of the people or of this House. I cannot see why the Government should resort to artifice in the management of the public affairs of this colony more than a private individual in the ordinary transactions of life. It may be necessary at times to resort to such subterfuges; but when subterfuges are used which militate against the general interests of the public, then, I say, the Government who are guilty of such conduct cannot possess the public confidence. If it is necessary that the land of the colony or any portion of it should be reserved for the public, being dedicated by Act of Parliament to such purpose, then let the Government having the power to reserve it be honest, just, and impartial in its exercise. Do not let the Government reserve large grants of land from their opponents. Why not reserve it from their supporters? Do not let them favor one at the expense of the other; because the public derive no benefit from such a line of conduct. If it is necessary that the whole of the Darling Downs and West Moreton districts shall be thrown open for the benefit of the public, let it be thrown open; and I shall support it. But I will not support the reservation of only a part, to throw certain men out of their occupation, when I see other men in the same occupation, on better lands, which ought to be reserved by the Government equally with the others, let go free and undisturbed. What do I find in that proclamation? That the Government, for purposes sufficiently known to themselves, and shortly before the meeting of Parliament, have thought proper to reserve certain tracts of country. Why not do it before? They profess to have made those reserves under sections of the Pastoral Leases Act. I am not aware that any new land Act has been passed which has very recently conferred that power upon them; I cannot see why, at this exact moment of time, this proclamation should have come out. The power of reservation has always remained in the hands of the Government, to be exercised at any time they think fit, according to the exigencies of the country. Therefore, I maintain, that if the reservation of the public lands was required

for public purposes—for the occupation of those who choose to take them up—the Government might have reserved such areas as from time to time would meet the demand; and, in the meantime, those who remained in occupation of that which was not reserved, and paid the rent, should be secured in the peaceable pursuit of their industry. But those reserves cannot by any possibility be taken up and occupied within a space of about a hundred years. I do think I am very near the mark when I state that. According to the present prospects of the colony, I certainly am not exceeding the truth; because I am taking the Darling Downs as applicable to only a certain class of occupants. There must be a stream of immigration flowing into the country; and, even if large numbers come, there must be a certain amount of capital, to enable occupation to be carried out beneficially. Still, if I am wrong in my calculations, I am not wrong in what I have said about the partiality of the Government. If it is necessary to reserve such large areas, the distribution might have been impartial. I find, on the one hand, reservations have been made extensively in certain parts of the Darling Downs and West Moreton, yet Helidon has not been included; I find that Jimbour and Cecil Plains have not been included; and I find that there are one or two others which I had noted down, but have missed for the moment. I should like to know the reason why such distinctions have been made? Is it because the honorable the Minister for Lands owns Jimbour, that it is not included? Is it because Cecil Plains belongs to Mr. James Taylor, a consistent and thorough supporter of the Government? Is it because Helidon belongs to a friend of the Premier, that it has been allowed to go scatheless? If a man comes out to this colony, and takes a fancy to a piece of land on Jimbour, why should he not take it from Jimbour as well as from Pilton? Why not take some of the fat acres of Westbrook? Why was Westbrook left out? I know that Jimbour and Eton Vale are divided by only an imaginary line; and I want to know why an acre of land on Jimbour is not as valuable as an acre in other places? Why was not the owner of that delightful station, who is enjoying the fruits thereof, disturbed as well as his neighbors? These facts prove the position I have taken;—they are as I have asserted, and they cannot be disproved. My questions can be answered in one way alone—that, because the Government have it in their hands to proclaim reserves, they have so proclaimed them as to benefit their friends and to ruin their enemies. Honorable members forming the Government may say “No” or not, as they like; it is a matter of perfect indifference to me. My observations, based on the facts I have given to the House, may not strike the mind of the honorable the Attorney-General—I do not expect they will, and I do not care—but I

have no doubt they strike the mind of the honorable the Minister for Lands. If the Government have good and solid reasons to urge in support of their having made those reservations for the benefit of the public, let them be given. I see no reason why a man who goes on the Downs for land, if he has a right to land at all, should not have the best; and he would very likely find the best on Jimbour or Westbrook. I repeat, that those reserves were proclaimed in a partial spirit, and in so very partial a spirit, that I am at a loss to understand the action of the Government in doing it. I say so calmly; I am treating this question from a political point of view. I am not making accusations, nor do I wish to do so; nor do I say that the Government made those reservations with the view of making any pecuniary profit, or from dishonesty. I do not accuse them personally, but I condemn them politically. I feel that the public cannot have confidence in a Government who follow such a course of proceeding as they have taken. I again submit to the House that there is a very grave charge against the Government. Unless it can be answered, and in such a manner as to satisfy this House that the conduct of the Government has been of benefit to the public, then this House ought to shew its sense of such conduct. Having touched upon the principal proceedings of the Government since the prorogation, I will now deal with a few matters of more recent date. Honorable members cannot have failed to notice that the Government have pursued a most unusual course in the way in which the address has been brought in—not in this House only, but in another place. There is no precedent for a Minister to have anything to do with concocting the address in reply to the opening Speech; but I find, here, that two out of four Ministers, with the Chairman of Committees, an officer of the House, formed the committee to draw up the address. What confidence can they have in themselves when they do such a thing? What confidence can they have in the House—or, rather, what confidence can the House have in them?—when they cannot get an independent committee to draw up the address? I say that shews an absolute want of confidence in themselves, or they would have imparted the Queen's Speech to an independent member who would have drawn up an address in reply, and have brought it forward, and spoken to it. What do we find in another place? The committee to draw up the address consisted of the Postmaster-General, a Minister; the Health Officer, a paid officer; the Collector of Customs, a paid officer; and another officer, who, if not salaried, is an immigration officer, and paid God knows how.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I trust the honorable member will not refer to what occurs in another place.

THE HON. R. PRING: I am perfectly in order. It is the action of the Government I am referring to, and they must take the consequences of their acts.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I rise to order, Mr. Speaker. I submit, sir, that this House can know nothing of what takes place in the other House, except by message.

THE HON. R. PRING: This House knows that the Government take action upon and regulate all the proceedings relative to preparing the address in reply to the Governor's opening Speech. Therefore, as the Government take charge of the coach, they must be answerable for the way in which it is drawn—or, rather, for the way in which it is driven by them. I am perfectly in order. What can be a greater exhibition of weakness than this conduct of the Government, who, out of Parliament, in the recess, could publish documents saying that they had the confidence of the country? Why did they not shew more confidence in themselves than act in the manner they did these two days? Now, Mr. Speaker, in reference to the Speech: I cannot agree to such a document. In the first place, I conceive the country is in such a state that we should have had a clear and fair explanation of its financial position. I would not have asked for a detailed account, but some explanation of its monetary affairs—about everything of which we have been kept in the dark, as always has been the case since the present Premier assumed his position of head of the Government. We could not, last session, get a committee on railways. The honorable gentleman opposed it, because it would have disclosed facts condemnatory of himself. This keeping back from the public everything that takes place during the recess is not the conduct of a Minister who has confidence in himself, or who has the confidence of the people. Why not afford some information of the critical times we have passed through? I see nothing about the railway—no mention in the paragraph that it was opened. There is, it is true, something about the line to Toowoomba being ready for traffic; but, if I am informed correctly, it was announced to have been opened on a specified day, and yet the Government want to open it again. All I can say is, that if it is open, it is not ready for traffic; it is dangerous for the public. Why is everything kept in the dark about our railways? Is it because all our money, or the best part of it, has been sunk there? I object, also, to the second paragraph of the Speech. I will not enter into the question whether it is a benefit to the colony or not that the Torres' Straits service should have been undertaken by us, or that we should have paid a heavy subsidy; but I do say that before the Government sent down delegates to the Postal Conference, or consented to the expenditure of a sum of money, they should have obtained the sanction of Parliament. I believe it will be found that in the other



colonies Acts of Parliament were passed before such was done.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: No; all Executive action.

The Hon. R. PRING: I dare say; but there were Acts of Parliament which enabled them to go into the question.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: No; the Acts of Parliament follow.

The Hon. R. PRING: Whether I am right or wrong, I hold that there was no necessity to send down the delegates at all, and none to expend money on the Torres' Straits route. We have spent enough upon toys already. We have a toy railway that will not pay. We had better understand that before we vote more for the Torres' Straits service. I don't know where the money is to come from which is to pay all the expenses of our delegates to Melbourne. I should like to know where the money is to come from to pay the interest of our loan. Yet it appeared that our Government delegates had put us down for £20,000 for the new postal arrangements, and said "We will get it." A nice position this House will be in when the Government ask us to pass an Act to carry out the decision of the conference and vote £20,000! We shall be obliged to say, "We have no money," when the time comes for carrying out the arrangement. The Government should have thought of that before. But, down south, they are already quarrelling amongst themselves; so that it appears that all the money which has been spent in sending delegates to the conference is so much thrown away. Are we to be saved by such a Government as we have? Is such conduct to be continued? Another paragraph of the Speech refers to immigration. How can I consent to that which tells me what I have known for a long time?—that the stoppage of immigration was suicidal. If we had been too hasty in introducing to our shores too many people, the contrary policy was equally bad. I find that the Government see this mistake now. They do not tell us what they are going to do—they are going to do something, but they are afraid to tell us what.

"A Bill on this vital question will be submitted for your consideration."

I have no doubt there will.

"The authorised public works are rapidly approaching completion."

I cannot assent to that. I know they cannot be completed until this House is asked that this unfortunate country shall borrow again. But how are we to get money? How are we to pay the interest on what we have got already? The credit of the colony will be impeached, and we shall get no more money. Why not be truthful? Why not say that the Government cannot finish the public works without borrowing more? Why not tell the truth, and say it is the conduct of the Government that has brought us to this

condition? They had no right to proceed with the works on the Warwick line. Why could they not stop them, and say, "When the exchequer is in a proper condition, and we can get the money, we shall go on again"? Why not shew at once, that they are animated by the spirit of economy and retrenchment, instead of by the opposite policy of rashness and incaution—by attempting to carry out works and to borrow the money to pay for them afterwards? The sixth paragraph of the Speech refers to matters very good in themselves, but not affecting the questions before the House. With respect to the seventh paragraph, I can only say that a joint committee will but tell us what we already know. We are all bankrupt and insolvent; we are taxed more per head of the population than any other community in the world. It can tell us nothing of our monetary position which we do not know full well. I think it would be better if some information were given to us by the Colonial Treasurer. He is in the best position of anybody in the colony to do so. He, and the Under Secretary, should know—perhaps he does not—all about it. But it is only by extracting it from them that the House will get any information that we should have at the hands of the Government. If any Treasurer can come forward with his budget and make up his balance sheet, so as to bring both sides to tally, and mystify the House; why, it seems to me, that he can mystify any joint committee. The seventh paragraph is, however, very clear. The Government do not know how to deal with the subject themselves; they have spent the money—they have wrecked the vessel and have tried to get her off and failed—and now they want to throw the responsibility on others. If they cannot do what in their position they ought to do—if they came to this House to do what they themselves ought to be able to do—it is a confession of weakness;—let somebody else try. The honorable the Colonial Treasurer says he cannot manage the finances; he asks the House to do it for him; he says—"Tell us what to do, and we, like good boys, will do it." What a position for a Government. I do not see the good of a joint committee, except to benefit them to the extent represented. Under the circumstances, therefore, I cannot support the several paragraphs of the Speech. As to the address itself, which we are called upon to adopt, it is like an affidavit to a bill in equity—it is an echo of the Speech. What else could be expected with two Ministers on the committee that concocted it? This sort of address is perfectly ridiculous, and I am heartily sick of such. It is a farce to bring it forward; it is not worthy to be spoken to by honorable members of this House, except by those who concocted it. For myself, apart from my general want of confidence in the Government, I refuse to assent to any such document.

There is a matter which I think ought to have been alluded to in the Speech. It may be said that matters of mere local interest should not be referred to in a document of this kind, and ordinarily speaking I think that would be a very good objection. It is well known—at least, when I say so, I only judge from reports that I have seen and heard—that in consequence of certain monetary difficulties with respect to the Brisbane bridge, the Government have been asked to assist the corporation. The erection of the bridge was authorised by Act of Parliament, and certain lands, represented at the time by the promoters of the object to be valuable, were given by the Government as an endowment, which, if there were not sufficient funds to build the bridge, would be of very great assistance therefor, or, with the addition of the tolls authorised to be collected, for the repayment of the money borrowed for the work. A contract had been entered into, and the bridge was commenced; but the corporation got into difficulties. Then I find that the Government—I suppose by Executive authority—were to assist the corporation with £1,000 a month. I should be very glad to see assistance given to so valuable a work by any Government, because if so large an amount were advanced I do not suppose they would not be so cautious as to get security for the repayment of it to the general revenue. I do not blame the Government for assisting the corporation, but for not informing this House of it. Why are we kept in the dark about the expenditure of this money? And, I should like to know what further assistance is to be given, and how it is to be done. All these things are of vital importance to the colony. But the people of Brisbane know no more of what the corporation is doing than this House does of what the Government are doing. I, as a citizen of Brisbane, want to know how the corporation is going on?—what the Government have done?—and how the money advanced is to be repaid? Instead of these great and vital questions being touched, the most petty and paltry questions are alluded to, which might have been shelved for months. It has been said—“What do you expect from a Queen’s Speech?” This is a very bad maxim. I should like to know what the people of England would think if Her Majesty went down to open Parliament, and she did not disclose what were the intentions of the Government as to the maintenance of peace, or the declaration of war. I maintain that the Queen’s Speech should contain as much information on public matters as possible;—not to mystify, for the people of England would not stand that. And now I have gone through many subjects, all of which I consider to be of the highest importance. With reference to the amendment which I shall do myself the honor to move presently, it will speak for itself. In conclusion, I submit that this question is a very serious one. I ask

this House not to make it a party question. I have not brought it forward with any such view, because if I wished to make it a party question—to throw down the gauntlet with a view to obstructing the Government—I should have taken very good care to have had five of my staunchest friends sitting at my back; and the little delay that would have caused would not have affected my position one iota. I take higher grounds. I look at this in a public light. So long as my political career lasts, I shall endeavor that it shall be for the public benefit. While I have the honor of a seat in this House I shall afford the public every information, on all subjects put before the House, that I can. I maintain that every question shall be brought up in this House, and answered by the Government. I have given them every opportunity of answering. If they can answer for themselves, or justify themselves, or if this House comes to that conclusion, then I shall have done my duty, and I shall be perfectly satisfied as regards the decision. That decision will not affect me at all, either as a public man or as a private gentleman; and, although I may differ from the vote recorded by this House, if they decide in favor of the Government, although I may hold my opinions still—I do hold them, and I may be in the wrong—I wish to assure this House that in acting as I have done on this occasion, I have done so for the public benefit. I think no harm can be done by the House discussing this question, but a great deal of good. In this way—Because, if this House has confidence in the Government, they will go more heartily to work, and come forward with their measures in a better spirit, and those measures will be dealt with by the House in a better temper, than if on every little occasion the Government are to be twitted for the past, and met with such charges as—“To-day you did this,” “Such a day you did that,” and so on. Now, the matter is before the House, and if any honorable member thinks fit to defend and support the action of the Government, or to condemn it, let him do so; but, when the question has been debated, rejected, and settled, let it rest; and I, for one, shall bow to the decision of the House, and, instead of shewing it, even if I feel a want of confidence in the Government, I shall be ready to support such measures that they may bring forward as I think are for the benefit of the colony, and I shall not be one who is constantly referring to past acts of the Government for the purpose either of annoying them or expressing a want of confidence in them. I think a great deal of good can be done by that course; and that much good will come from its general adoption. I hope that I have not, in my remarks, done anything, either by language or otherwise, that will give any offence to the Government. I wish not to offend any honorable member or Government in this House; and I hope that

nothing wrong or displeasing to the House has fallen from me this evening. I beg, sir, to move the amendment of which I have before spoken.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I wish to ask, sir, whether the honorable member intends to persist in his amendment?

The Hon. R. PRING: Yes; I shall divide the House upon it.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: Perhaps it is the best thing to do. I asked the question, because, before the adjournment of the House, yesterday, it was understood that the honorable member had signified his intention not to move an amendment at all. An observation was made by the honorable member for Maryborough, to the effect that he hoped an amendment would be moved; and I understood the honorable member for the Burnett to say that it would not. (No, no.) However, twenty-four hours have had a material effect upon the honorable member, and I am quite satisfied that he and his friends are right in pushing the question to an issue. They have a perfect right to do so. I did not, however, understand from the honorable member for the Burnett that he had made up his mind to such a decided course of action; neither did I understand from the honorable member for North Brisbane, Mr. Raff,—although he took considerable objection to the style of the address—that he had made up his mind that the time had arrived when it was expedient to remove the present Ministry from office. Sir, I congratulate the honorable member who has just moved the amendment upon the manner in which he has put the case before the House. He has preferred a distinct indictment against the Ministry; and I am glad to hear it is not against one member only, but the Ministry as a whole. I understand, from the burden of the honorable member's remarks, that his criticisms were of a general nature; but the honorable member for the Burnett took special exception to the head of the Ministry, whom he designated as a despotic Minister, and inferred that the Government of the colony had in the meantime subsided altogether. Now, I think that is hardly a fair position to take up. I do not think it is fair towards us, or towards my honorable colleague the Premier. The honorable member was not doing himself justice when he spoke thus of the Premier. He has acted heretofore with great cordiality in the Ministry, of which he and I were members, with the present head of the Government; and I am not aware that there has been any such decided change of policy since that time as to justify the honorable member in stating that the acts of the Government, or any member of the Government, are totally different to what they were when he was in office. As I understood him—for I prefer adverting to the remarks of the honorable member for the Burnett, as they were more condensed, and, in reality, more fully upon the question—he objected

primarily to the formation of what he termed a squatting Ministry, after Mr. Herbert had failed to form a Government, and taken his departure. But, sir, I ask, were not the circumstances such as to justify the honorable member at the head of the Government in the course he pursued upon that occasion? A great deal of difficulty and distress prevailed at the time. Mr. Herbert, as I have stated, had failed to form a Government, and the honorable member for the Burnett had been defeated in a contested election at Ipswich; and the Government had consequently broken down. (No, no.) I think I am right; the honorable member was defeated at Ipswich, and, as he has admitted to-night, he did not wish to perpetuate animosities, and thought it was for the benefit of the country that he should not persist in forming a Ministry at that time, although he believed a constituency was open to him. And the present Premier, when appealed to by His Excellency to form a Government, very properly said, "It is my duty to do so; there is probably no other person better fitted for such a task; and if I cannot succeed in obtaining the assistance I expected, I must seek the co-operation of honorable members with whom I have not always acted, and endeavor at this juncture to do the best I can for the colony, and to tide over the evil time." What was the result of that negotiation? The honorable the Premier applied to the late Colonial Treasurer, Mr. McLean, and to my honorable friend and late colleague the member for Western Downs, who united with him in the desire to contribute as much as possible to the welfare of the colony in a time of difficulty, and, not being personally anxious to hold office, consented to join that honorable member's Government. On that occasion, I fully approved of their course of conduct. I saw in the late Colonial Treasurer the man, above all others, best suited to undertake the duties which devolved upon him—a man who, above all others, possessed the confidence of the country upon that particular question on which we had to legislate. I am quite sure the honorable member at the head of the Government felt this—that he fully appreciated the integrity and high character of that gentleman. He found, also, in the honorable member for the Western Downs, a gentleman who, in every respect, might be trusted and depended upon; and he felt that these two gentlemen were in every way qualified to take part in the consideration of the very important measures which were then introduced; such as the Leasing Bill—a very important measure, about which great expectations were formed,—the fiscal measures, and measures of taxation which were unfortunately necessary, at that time, to meet our indebtedness. It was felt that the burdens were heavy, but that it was our first duty to submit to them, in order to retain our honor, and sustain the credit of the colony. That was the position in which my honorable col-

league found himself. I am not aware that any differences of opinion existed in that Government, although, of course, things do not always run as smoothly as might be desired. These gentlemen, however, acted cordially together. Perhaps the honorable member for the Burnett thought that he ought to have been called into the councils of the country; and I believe an offer was made to him. I had not that offer, although I believed I was, at that time, quite as much entitled to it. But I was willing to forego any claim, real or imaginary, which I might have possessed, for the benefit of the country. I maintain, sir, that this squatting Government, as it has been termed, was not formed despotically, but with the best intentions for the welfare of the country, and in order to carry out measures which it was absolutely necessary should be passed. Now, what has taken place since? The next charge is that the Government, and especially the Premier, has recklessly refused to recognise the claims which this House has upon its consideration—that they have set aside its decisions. That is a distinct charge, and it is one of despotism—that, in fact, the Government have set at naught the will of this House. I affirm that this was not the case. The Government simply carried out the expressed and recorded will of the Legislature; and I maintain that the resolution, or sets of resolutions, referred to, have nothing to do with the will of this country, though they might be indications of the opinions of those who voted for them. But what are they? The sum and substance of them culminates in the last clause into an indistinct assertion that it would be desirable to exercise economy in the matter of the Warwick Railway, and that if possible the contract should be cancelled. That resolution, sir, was decided by your casting vote, and we heard nothing more about it. It was not then sent to the Legislative Council, although an interval of a week elapsed, during which time it was quite within the power of the House to take further action by sending it to the other chamber for concurrence, or by formally announcing through the recognized medium of the House that it should be forwarded by message to His Excellency the Governor. Then, if the Government had refused to assent to the principle embodied in the resolutions, they would have expressed their dissent, and the House might have said “You do not any longer enjoy our confidence,” and would have carried a hostile division against them. But the real fact was, that after Parliament was prorogued a great deal of apprehension was excited, and very naturally so, and amongst members of Parliament especially, about the expenditure of the Government, and it was felt desirable that this should be contracted as much as possible. But I contend the Government had no right to assume to themselves the functions of Parliament in session, which

they would have done if they had recognized the members of the deputation to the Governor as members of Parliament when Parliament was sitting. His Excellency had no right, and could not have exercised the right to recognise them otherwise than as private gentlemen—gentlemen no doubt of great weight and influence, and entitled to every consideration, but still at the time private gentlemen. But, as persons enjoying any particular privileges not enjoyed by other members of the community, I repeat that His Excellency would not have been justified in recognizing them. Much stress has been laid by the honorable member for the Burnett upon the reply of the Premier to the memorial in question. I am not going now to justify entirely the character of that reply; I do not know that the Premier himself would seek to do so; he would treat these things in a great measure as things of the past. He would say simply that he would not have felt himself justified in abandoning altogether the works on the Warwick Railway, and that if he had done so he would have set aside an Act of Parliament for a simple resolution. And I do not see, because he chose to adopt the course he did, that he should be designated a despotic minister. Now the next act—for that has passed over, and the excitement it caused has subsided—with which the Ministry are charged, is that they have taken upon themselves powers which they did not possess, in proclaiming the large agricultural reserves lately notified in the *Government Gazette*, and that they have ruined the securities of the country—that they have done that which the law did not allow them to do, and that they deserve the highest reprobation for this insensate conduct. It has been said that advantage has been taken by the Government of their position to pay off old grudges upon their political antagonists, and that they have not consulted the interests of the country by making these large areas. Now, does any honorable member who has occupied a seat in this House for the last three or four years, does any person who is acquainted with the colony affirm that the reserves which have been proclaimed are not the most suitable for agricultural purposes that could have been made. Some may consider they are not large enough, and others may be of opinion that the whole country should be reserved; but we are bound to exercise the soundest discretion, and to bring the best information we can obtain to guide us in dealing with these matters. I wish to refer further to this subject, as it is one in which I have taken a very considerable interest. I find, upon reference to “Hansard,” that in 1864 I moved the following resolution:—

“That in order to provide for the future settlement of an agricultural population in a locality suitable to the growth of cereals, it is expedient to set apart for sale the land adjacent to, and lying on, the western slopes of the Maui”

Range. That in order to give effect to the foregoing resolution, an address be presented to the Governor, praying that on and before the 1st January next ensuing, His Excellency will cause notice to be served upon the occupants of crown lands within the limits hereinafter set forth, that the runs, or portions of runs therein included, shall be resumed for sale:—Commencing at a point on the Main Range parallel to the Crow's Nest, thence by a line westerly till it intersects the road from Rosalie Plains to Drayton; thence by the road from Drayton to Warwick, *via* Eton Vale, Pilton, and Allora; thence by the Maryland road to the southern boundary of the colony; thence easterly by that boundary to the Main Range; thence by that range so as to include the heads of the western watershed to the point of commencement."

A debate took place on that occasion, and I find that my honorable friend at the head of the Government opposed me, but he did so in very qualified terms, and he stated that when the time should arrive for making considerable agricultural reserves he should be prepared to assent to them—he professed his willingness to take the necessary steps when the proper time arrived. What has happened since then? We have spent a great deal of money in the construction of railways, and what justification can there be for that expenditure unless steps are taken concurrently to settle an agricultural population on the lands in its vicinity. I may say that I never voted for the Warwick Railway, but finding it decided upon by the law of the country, I, of course, wish to do my best to make it a profitable undertaking. And of what use is it to construct a line of railway for the sake of some half-a-dozen stations? Such a proceeding would be wholly unjustifiable. There is another feature to which I desire to draw the attention of the House, which is, that, in addition to this inherent principle of justice, in addition to the fact that these reserves were contemplated years ago, and embrace the lands which are the most suitable for agricultural purposes, there is the operation of the Leasing Act to be taken into consideration. Considerable surveys were made, the land was surveyed in detached portions for the convenience of the small farmers, and it was expected that in the operation of the Act the much desired object would be achieved. But what was the result? The old purchasers of land under the pre-emptive right availed themselves of the provisions of the Act to take up the land in very much the same way as they had done before. There was in reality no competition, and the Government saw large areas of the most valuable land in Queensland gradually passing into the hands of persons whom they rightly considered unimproving proprietors. Now, while on this subject, I should like to advert to a few facts in reference to the possession of property on the Darling Downs. I find that during the last few years, since Separation, on the following runs the pre-emptive right has been exercised

to this extent:—Gowrie, 10,886 acres; Westbrook, 43,062; Eton Vale, 33,004; Clifton, 16,124; Pilton, 5,524; Haldon, 3,882; Goomburra, 12,205; Glengallan, 31,166; Maryvale, 2,620; Gladfield, 2,902; Talgai, 23,292; Toolburra North, 10,765; Toolburra South, 1,947; Canning Downs, 22,994; making a total of 223,373 acres purchased under the pre-emptive right since Separation. I believe there were some purchases before that time, but, if so, I have not the details of them. Now, sir, if we look at the history of this colony, we shall find that a few landed proprietors, enjoying special and prescriptive rights had become possessors of these magnificent properties. We have to deal with facts as they exist, and I am now speaking of what it was desirable and expedient to do in order to bring the Leasing Act into active and beneficial operation. When we found that small farmers were not availing themselves of the provisions of the Act, and that they could not be expected to avail themselves of it; when we found that competition was practically at an end, and that the agricultural lands were rapidly finding their way into the hands of the large proprietors, we considered it necessary to take some steps to put an end to such a state of things. Well, the decision of the Government was, that in those localities which they considered peculiarly fitted for the small farmers, they should try the principle of occupation and settlement. And what right have any of those large proprietors to complain? They must surely acknowledge that for the last seven years they have enjoyed those lands, to the detriment of the country at large; and yet they say, that now the land is required for the purposes of agriculture, others are not to be allowed to share those advantages with them—that is the long and short of it. The selections, too, they have made comprise the choicest portions of these lands. They have taken up almost all the water frontages, though there are certainly some frontages left, which I hope will be made available for an agricultural population. One would really imagine that, in connection with this Warwick Railway question, the Government had been profuse in their expenditure, and had actually disregarded the will and intention of the Legislature. Now, the fact is, that the expenditure on the Warwick Railway has been as small as possible, consistent with going on with the contract; it has not exceeded £5,000 per month. We have expedited the work on this line; we felt that we were not justified in altogether abandoning it, and we felt that we were bound to carry out the works to which the Government and the House were pledged. One would imagine, from the observations which have been made by honorable members on the other side of the House, that the Government had been reckless and profuse in their expenditure. That is not the case. Now, sir, remarks have been made,

which I will take this opportunity of correcting, on one paragraph in the Speech, which appears to have been thoroughly misunderstood, though I believe not wilfully so. The seventh paragraph certainly does not bear the interpretation which has been put upon it. For my part, sir, I do not shrink from any investigation which may be made into the finances of the colony. I should be glad to court such an inquiry. I am quite sure that this House might, without any impropriety, assist a Colonial Treasurer in times of difficulty; and indeed this was done during the last session. But we do not, by this paragraph, invite your attention to the state of the finances of the colony as far as the Government are concerned. I hope, in due time, to make some explanation, which, if not altogether satisfactory, will afford the House some information upon this matter. The paragraph in question has reference to our monetary position in the sense of the country—of the whole community, and not of the Government. I have heard with astonishment that it was expected there would have been a financial statement embodied in His Excellency's Speech, which would have been quite an unprecedented course to pursue. It has been felt, especially during the hard times through which we have passed, that our position was not a satisfactory one. As a colony, we have been speculating largely upon credit; we have expected great returns from all sorts of adventures, and unhappily these returns are not at present of the most flattering character. Still, it is desirable that we should obtain information on these subjects, and it is especially desirable to direct attention to the currency of the country. Surely honorable members have not forgotten that there was a Treasury Notes Bill passed last session; and I am surprised that no allusion whatever has been made to it; one would almost fancy it had passed away entirely from the face of the earth. I can assure honorable members I am by no means ashamed of those notes. I believe they have fully met the expectations formed of them by the late Colonial Treasurer. I believe he anticipated that they would prove of great benefit to the banks themselves, and that their circulation would be a general relief to the community. I must freely admit that these banking institutions have not shewn any extreme hostility to the treasury notes; at the same time, they have naturally taken advantage of a fair field to compete with them. They have felt that this was not a line of business upon which the Government should enter, and they have felt that it was not to the interest of the Government or the country that the Government should contest that business with them. But I do not wish to prejudice a case upon which I wish this House to express an opinion, and if that be adverse to the opinion of the Government, they will no doubt explain their views at the proper time. I do trust

that this question will be dispassionately considered. We have nothing to gain by shewing hostility to these banking institutions; the whole property of the country is involved in them, and any investigation which takes place in this House should be conducted in a friendly spirit, if it is to be successful, and we are to ascertain upon what grounds our credit is based. It must not be overlooked that this question is attracting great attention in England. The Act under which the Bank of England at present operates will shortly lapse, and it is certain that some changes will be made in the management of that great institution. It may perhaps be said that before legislating on the matter, we should wait until we could obtain the benefit of the vast experience involved in that inquiry. But it is not the first time that colonies have dared to make, and they have made experiments—in the Real Property Office, and in many other branches of legislation—which might be contemplated with a certain amount of dread in older countries; and if we devote ourselves to the consideration of this matter in a proper spirit, and not in a spirit hostile to the institutions upon which our credit depends, we shall obtain a great deal of valuable information, and we need have no reason to fear the result. I do not, sir, intend to detain the House much longer, but there are one or two other questions to which I must briefly refer. Exception has been taken to the second clause in the Speech, which I think was quite unnecessary; because in that paragraph the Government only followed the precedent laid down in all Queen's Speeches, where it is customary to allude to foreign matters before touching upon home topics; that is the reason why the Postal Conference takes precedence of other colonial matters. On this subject it is not at all necessary to be precipitate. Some time must elapse before the propositions can be carried into effect, the assent of the Imperial Government has not yet been received; and in the meantime I do not see that we shall be called upon for any immediate outlay towards the rather large sum of money that will be required. It would almost appear, from the remarks of honorable members, that this scheme has never been viewed with favor by this House. What are the facts? We have strained every nerve to open a new postal route.

AN HONORABLE MEMBER: Not the Panama route.

THE COLONIAL TREASURER: No; but we have obtained a compromise by which, if the colonies can work together, we shall succeed in establishing upon advantageous terms the line *via* Torres' Straits. That being the case, I do not see why we should be treated with the sneering remarks which fell from the honorable member, the leader of the Opposition. He says there is no probability that this scheme

will be carried out by the colony of Victoria. I can only say that I read the proceedings of the conference with great interest, and they shewed to me that there existed on the part of the other colonies a great desire to bring the matter to a good result. I believe it will be passed in Melbourne, as they have given way very much in the matter. It has been said that the interests of Victoria have been sacrificed, and I think she has given way a great deal, and shewn an unselfish desire to promote the general benefit of the Australian colonies. The Ministry there, I am informed, are determined to stake their position on this question, which, there is no doubt, they will carry. Perhaps I need not refer at any great length to the public works of the colony; but I must say that, instead of the carping remarks which have been made by certain honorable members on this subject, I think we might very well have received some expressions of regret that the floods which have unfortunately taken place lately have prevented the opening of the railway with that *eclat* which was anticipated. The honorable member who throughout has displayed so much interest and energy in connection with these works, and has worked so harmoniously with us, has left us—not upon any question of general or public interest, but for personal reasons. During our official intercourse, we have acted in concert in the most cordial manner, and it was simply a matter of personal opinion which induced him to resign. Probably the honorable member did not very heartily concur in the proclamation of those agricultural reserves; but on the whole he has acted with us, and for us, in the most efficient manner, and we can only regret that we have lost in him a most energetic and zealous member. And I do not see why, because there has been an unlucky *contretemps* in the opening of the line, that the Government should be treated with the sneering expressions which have fallen from some honorable members on the Opposition benches. Perhaps it is as well on the whole, taking into consideration the preparations which had been made, that the line should have been opened as it was, and I think it is rather a subject for regret that we were not partakers, though we may be at some future date, in the festivities which usually mark such an occasion, and possibly some day the House may even adjourn for such a purpose. The honorable member for the Burnett has indulged in some pleasantry at the expense of my honorable friend the Minister for Lands, and at my expense. He has referred to the magnificent runs we possess, and asked why the reserves which have been proclaimed did not extend to them. Now, sir, I believe no person in his senses will say that it is necessary to reserve Jimbour, and I believe my honorable colleague did make a large reserve in one of his runs, Cumkil-

lenbar. I think, sir, it is ungenerous and unfair to refer to these personal matters. It has been stated that these reserves have been proclaimed in order to pay off grudges against our political opponents. Why, what political opponents have we interested in them—unless, perhaps, it may be one honorable member in the other House? And are we to exclude these lands because one squatter has property in the neighborhood? The idea of personal animosity, or personal legislation, has never for a moment entered into our heads. But, sir, apart from these details, there is no doubt that the question has resolved itself into this—Are the present Ministry to remain in power or not? If this question be decided in the negative, they are prepared to give way to any future Ministry who may be able to undertake the Government of the country in a satisfactory way. But I must say that I, for one, cannot look forward with any great degree of confidence to any of the honorable members of the Opposition who have addressed themselves to the consideration of public affairs this evening and yesterday. Nor in the honorable member for the Burnett do I look for any remarkable ability in the administration of affairs. I cannot expect from him that he will look forward with any degree of pleasure to a share in the Government of this unhappy country. The honorable gentleman spoke of nails driven into the coffin of the colony. If he entertains that opinion, and is willing to preside at our obsequies, I certainly cannot expect much good from his administration of its general affairs. Then, again, if I look at the honorable member for Maryborough, I find in him a very earnest but a very abstracted politician, who indulges in what I cannot help considering extreme vagaries. He has given notice of all sorts of motions involving the abrogation of a great number of taxes. No doubt that is very pleasant, but it is highly imaginary, and would be wholly destructive. Does the honorable member pretend to say that he is about to assume office with any deliberate intention of doing away with our taxation? He, himself, affirmed but recently that we were not only on the brink of insolvency, but in the very slough of despondency; that we were irretrievably ruined; that there was no hope for us. Yet the honorable member admitted that we are ruined, and yet as honorable men willing to pay our debts. (No.) Then the honorable member is inclined to justify a course of repudiation, and that I suppose is to be the policy of the new Ministry—we are not to pay our debts, and continue to levy upon our creditors. I must repeat that I cannot expect much good to the country from the exponents of such a policy. Then the honorable member for the Burnett, Mr. Pring, who has addressed the House at such length, has told us, among other things, that it would take one hundred years to settle the Darling Downs. This is a representative

of the new ideas which are to restore our prosperity and place the country in a proper position. From these gentlemen, I say, I cannot expect much. If there is to be a new Ministry, I hope it may be composed of new men altogether. Let us get rid of all the old hacks and find men who are willing to grapple with the real difficulties of the country. If such men can be found, and they are prepared to admit—and I do not wish to shrink from the investigation that we are not at present in the most satisfactory position—that they are willing to exert themselves to restore our credit and extricate us from our difficulties, they shall have my support. If, in addition to that, they are men who do not despair of the eventual prosperity of the colony, they shall have my support. If they are men who will wisely, and justly, and liberally administer the land laws of the colony, and will give effect to the agricultural reserves, they shall have my support. I can give my support to no other men, and unless such men can be found, although they may not be in the present House, I shall be unable to support any new Government. It may be necessary to appeal to the country, though that is not anticipated at present. Such a course, however, may be forced upon us. We do not, I say, expect it, but whatever course may be pursued, if the amendment before the House be carried, I trust the House will not accept a Ministry composed of men who, I think, have not shewn themselves capable of administering the affairs of the country properly, or that they possess a policy which is calculated to be of service to the colony.

On the motion of Mr. WATSON, the debate was adjourned until the following day, to take precedence of all other business.