

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

WEDNESDAY, 15 MAY 1867

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Wednesday, 15 May, 1867.

Presentation of Address in reply to Opening Speech.—
Ministerial Statement.—Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum.—
Prevention of Contagious Diseases Bill.—Adjournment.

PRESENTATION OF ADDRESS IN REPLY
TO THE OPENING SPEECH.

The PRESIDENT informed the Council that, in pursuance of the order of the previous day, he had, with the seconder of the address, and other honorable members of the Council, waited upon His Excellency the Governor at Government House, and presented the address adopted by the Council in reply to the Opening Speech, and that His Excellency had been pleased to make the following reply:—

“MR. PRESIDENT AND HONORABLE GENTLEMEN,—

“I thank you, in the name of the Queen, for this loyal address. I rely with confidence on your cordial co-operation with the other branches of the Legislature in all measures calculated to promote the welfare and prosperity of all classes of Her Majesty's subjects in this colony.

“G. F. BOWEN.

“Government House,

“Brisbane, 15th May, 1867.”

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: Honorable gentlemen—I claim the indulgence of the House to make a short Ministerial explanation in reference to the changes which have been made in the constitution of the Government since last session. It will be in the recollection of honorable members that the late lamented Colonial Treasurer, Mr. McLean, died on the 15th December last. I believe that men of all parties, whatever may be their political opinions, have paid a tribute of respect to his memory. I will not dilate upon this subject, as I should have done if the occasion had been nearer to the time of his death. As soon as the Government could realise their position, we held a consultation on the subject. Several persons were suggested; but, on the whole, we thought Mr. Douglas the most eligible person to fill his place, and it was proposed that we should nominate him as Treasurer; and accordingly he was sworn in, on the 19th December. He had not, at that time, a seat in either House; and as this became necessary, he addressed the electors of Eastern Downs, where there was then a vacancy in consequence of Mr. McLean's death. He was returned on the 4th January, and has since discharged the duties of Colonial Treasurer, and I am happy to say that the utmost harmony has existed between him and myself and the other members of the Ministry during the whole time. The next change which took place refers to the late Secretary for Works, my honorable

friend Mr. Watts. Mr. Watts, as honorable gentlemen are aware, was appointed to what was called the Coalition Ministry even before I joined it, and was charged particularly with the public works and railways which pertained to his department. No doubt he exerted himself with great energy in carrying out this duty. I do not feel called upon to express any one opinion as to the result of his work; but I believe he acted throughout with perfect honesty of purpose, and for the best. And, I may say, it is very difficult indeed, in any matter so involved as railways, for an unprofessional, or, indeed, a professional man, to say whether he has succeeded. All I have to say is, that he has acted with the greatest energy, and in the most conscientious manner. But, at the same time, although I do not for a moment wish to shrink from the responsibility which to a certain extent devolves upon every member of the Government for his action, I do not mean to pledge myself to say that it was the wisest and the best. It is possible that, before the session is much older, matters will be brought before the House which will have the effect of enlightening honorable gentlemen upon these points. But with that I have very little to do. I have now to explain his reasons for leaving the Ministry. The Colonial Treasurer and I have always entertained strong opinions on the land question; and although he joined a coalition Ministry, appointed for a certain purpose, we were both determined to act upon our own peculiar views relating to the crown lands of the colony, or else leave the Ministry. Before we took any action, however, the Secretary for Lands brought up the scheme which is before the House and the country—that of agricultural reserves. Mr. Douglas and I saw that it was a step in the direction of the views we had entertained for many years, and of course we hailed it with pleasure. It was brought forward on the 17th April, and Mr. Watts, although he did not pronounce any very decided opinion against it, gave private reasons why he could not be a party to such a course; and, therefore, on the 17th April he proposed to resign. But, as there was a probability of bringing part of the railway works to a conclusion, and as it was not proposed that Parliament should meet before the 1st of May, we considered it better for him to withhold his resignation until after the opening of the railway, which was expected about the end of April. Mr. Watts co-operated with us on all matters unconnected with this particular question of agricultural reserves. The reserves were gazetted, and he is entirely free from any blame—if blame be attributable in the matter. No new Minister has yet been named to fill his office. That is the state of the case, and I do not see that I am called upon to say anything more on the subject, except that which I think is not much credited out of doors—during the time the Coalition Ministry was in office, the

greatest harmony prevailed, each member of the Ministry giving up perhaps a little of his own peculiar views on different subjects.

The Hon. W. WOOD: Perhaps the honorable gentleman will explain how it was that the Government of which he is a member went out of their way, contrary to all constitutional practice, in appointing a Treasurer who held a seat in neither branch of the Legislature. The only argument which he had heard in support of such procedure cited, was an instance of some Attorney-General or Solicitor-General in England, but in that case the appointment was not made until the gentleman had obtained a seat; he was told that if he were elected he would be appointed.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL contended that the Government had committed no unconstitutional act, and that Her Majesty's representative had perfect right to call to the councils of the country any person either in or out of Parliament.

The Hon. W. WOOD rose to reply, when

The PRESIDENT said the debate was altogether irregular. It was customary to allow the representative of the Government to make a ministerial explanation and perhaps a leading member of the Opposition to offer a few remarks in reply; but a debate in such case was irregular. The proper course for the honorable member to pursue, if he wished to enter into any question at length, was to give notice of motion in the usual way.

The Hon. W. WOOD moved the adjournment of the House, in order to have an opportunity of replying to the latter part of the remarks made by the honorable the Postmaster-General. There was no doubt that when Mr. Watts, the late Minister for Works, returned to town, he understood that a Cabinet Council, and then an Executive Council, were to meet at certain hours on the following day. But the Premier came down afterwards, and the arrangement was altered; and the notice of the alteration was not sent to Mr. Watts, who, in a very natural fit of indignation, put all his papers together on the table, and laid his resignation on the top of them, although up to that time he had not the slightest intention of resigning. The honorable the Postmaster-General affirmed that the greatest harmony had prevailed between the late Secretary for Works and his colleagues, but he should have said—with the exception of the Premier—for Mr. Watts had stated in another place that he had a crow to pluck with that honorable gentleman. Mr. Watts, unquestionably, had felt himself insulted by the Premier, and that was why the country had lost a good minister.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: I can easily clear up the point about which the honorable gentleman has made so much. On the 17th April the late Secretary for Works had positively announced his intention of resigning. I happened to accompany him from Ipswich, after the abortive attempt at railway opening, and saw him up to the moment he went

to his office. He said he should resign, and that he ought to have resigned on the 1st May. Upon which I observed that it would be better to go to the Council, and take leave of us all. Mr. Watts said he would do so, and then he went out of town. I went to my office at about 2.30 p.m., and in the first instance found a notice to attend a meeting at 10.30 the next day. About an hour after Mr. Watts had gone home a second notice came, which changed the time to 9 o'clock. As a similar notice was sent to his office—I cannot understand why his under-secretary did not open it and forward it to Mr. Watts. We supposed that message to have been forwarded, and the Premier sent for his under-secretary to ascertain whether it had been forwarded or not, and it appeared that it had. The messenger was sent for, and it appeared that Mr. Watts lived out of town, and the notice had been left at the Works Office; and I am afraid that Mr. Watts, as my honorable friend has observed, wrote his resignation—perhaps naturally—under a feeling of indignation. But I must say that during the whole of the time, from the 17th April to the 1st of May, my honorable friend had no idea of continuing in office, and after the 1st May questions which did not refer to matters which were to come into play at once were not submitted to him, and he was not after that date connected with the policy of the Government. I can state positively that his resignation was entirely his own act.

The motion for adjournment was by leave withdrawn.

WOOGAROO LUNATIC ASYLUM.

The Hon. W. WOOD again moved the adjournment of the House for the purpose of asking the Postmaster-General whether he was aware that a half-witted girl, who, as honorable gentlemen would recollect, had escaped from the Lunatic Asylum at Woogaroo last year, and had been cruelly maltreated, had been found by a policeman. She had been found in the streets of Brisbane destitute of clothing and in a most miserable state. It would be remembered, that in consequence of the inquiry which took place on the previous occasion, one of the warders and the matron were dismissed. The unfortunate girl had now been found the third time in this wretched and unprotected condition, and his object in speaking about it was to urge upon the Government the necessity of taking steps to prevent such apparent neglect of ordinary care. The girl had been taken back, and received as an escaped lunatic; but what was the most singular part of the story was that the authorities at the asylum never seemed to have missed her or made any inquiries about her, or even telegraphed to the police, and there could be very little vigilance employed to prevent lunatics from escaping when even a girl of weak mind could leave the place without her absence being discovered.

The PRESIDENT called the attention of the honorable member to the fact that he had twice moved the adjournment of the House in order to bring forward matters which ought properly to have been the subject of notices of motion. It was not competent for an honorable member to move the adjournment of the House twice in succession; it was necessary that some other matter should intervene between the two motions. Such a course was irregular, and also an abuse of the privilege, which should only be made use of when absolutely necessary.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said there was no question before the House, and he must decline to answer questions of which notice was not given in due course.

The matter then dropped.

PREVENTION OF CONTAGIOUS DISEASES BILL.

The Hon. W. WOOD moved the second reading of a "Bill for the prevention of contagious diseases." He stated that it was not his intention to say much on the subject: he should content himself with treating the Bill as a similar measure had been dealt with in the Imperial Parliament. There was no doubt that such a Bill was very desirable, and it was not necessary to discuss it clause by clause at present. The Act which had been passed in England had, he believed, been despatched by the Secretary of State with some others to the Governors of the different colonies, with a request that they would induce their Government to bring in Bills of the same nature. It had met with very little opposition in England, except that a complaint was made by certain parties, that no attempt to reform these people was made, but a provision to that effect would be found in the 17th clause of the Bill before the House. After that alteration had been made there was no opposition in the House of Commons, and it met with the unanimous approval of the Lords, including all the Bishops. He hoped honorable members would read it a second time, as there could be no objection to it. He might add, that the Attorney-General had approved of it and had promised to get his colleagues to support it.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he should adopt the very proper reticence of the honorable gentleman, but he must say that he hoped the Government would not be considered pledged by the course he was about to adopt, viz., to vote for the second reading. The subject was a very large one, and one which required a great deal of thought and attention. No doubt a measure of that sort was wanted, and he could see no valid objection to it. He thought, however, it would be wrong to prevent the other House from expressing an opinion upon the measure, and personally he should offer no opposition to it.

The question was then put and passed, and the Bill was read a second time.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House then adjourned on the motion of the honorable the Postmaster-General until Wednesday next, 22nd instant, at 3 o'clock.