

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 26 APRIL 1870

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ADDRESS IN REPLY TO OPENING
SPEECH.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY moved—

1. That a Select Committee be appointed to prepare an Address in Reply to the Speech delivered by His Excellency the Governor, in opening this, the Third Session of the Fourth Parliament of Queensland.

2. That such Committee consist of the following members, viz.:—Messrs. Macalister, Stephens, Jordan, and the Mover.

Question put and passed.

The Committee retired; and, being returned, the Colonial Secretary brought up the Address prepared by the Committee, and the same was read by the Clerk, as follows:—

“To His Excellency SAMUEL WENSLEY
BLACKALL, Esquire, Governor and Com-
mander-in-Chief of the Colony of Queens-
land and its Dependencies.

“MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

“1. We, Her Majesty's loyal and dutiful subjects, the Members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled, desire to assure your Excellency of our continued loyalty and affection towards the Person and Government of our Most Gracious Sovereign, and to tender our thanks to your Excellency for the Speech with which you have opened the present Session.

“2. We shall earnestly consider the expediency of completing the public works you have mentioned.

“3. The various other important measures to be placed before us shall receive the fullest and most careful consideration, in the hope that they may enhance the material prosperity, comfort, and happiness of the people.”

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said: Mr. Speaker—In the present state of parties in this House, I have to say that I am about to break through what has been the ordinary usage on these occasions: I am about, myself, sir, to move that this Address be adopted. In doing so, sir, I think it would be well, perhaps, that my example should be followed by future Ministers. I make this observation, because I believe that it has become more a mere matter of form than of substance: I believe that there is great reluctance displayed by honorable members in this House, from time to time, to assist any Government in proposing the adoption of the Address in Reply; because honorable members are apt to imagine that, in so doing, they commit themselves to all the policy in the Speech. With this explanation, I move—

That the Address in Reply to His Excellency's Opening Speech, as read by the Clerk, be now adopted by this House.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Tuesday, 26 April, 1870.

Meeting of Parliament.—The Governor's Opening Speech.
—Address in Reply to Opening Speech.

MEETING OF PARLIAMENT.

The House assembled, this day, pursuant to Proclamation.

Shortly after twelve o'clock, noon, the Usher of the Black Rod was introduced, bearing a message from His Excellency the GOVERNOR, desiring the attendance of Mr. Speaker and honorable members of the Legislative Assembly, in the Council Chamber. The House proceeded thither, accordingly; and, being returned, adjourned until half-past three o'clock.

THE GOVERNOR'S OPENING SPEECH.

Upon the re-assembling of the House, and after the disposal of certain formal and routine business,

The SPEAKER reported that His Excellency the Governor had opened the session with a Speech delivered to both Houses of Parliament, and that, for greater accuracy herein, he had obtained a copy of the Speech, which he read to the House forthwith. [See p. 1.]

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC WORKS seconded the motion.

Mr. BELL said: Mr. Speaker—I rise for the purpose of moving an amendment to the Address in Reply to His Excellency's Opening Speech. It will be my duty to read the words in which that amendment is couched before I resume my seat; but, in order that my object may be fully understood, I may state at the outset, that, should the amendment be carried, it will amount to a vote of want of confidence in the Government. Sir, I think there are few men who would be found willing to take steps to overthrow any Government in this colony, at this time, merely for the sake of change; for we have to deplore, as well as the neighboring colonies, too frequent changes of Ministries. But, I think, at the same time, fewer men there are who would not prefer to see a change of Government every six months rather than to give their support to one which does not possess the confidence or the respect of the country; and, sir, I may add, referring to the Government which we have now to address ourselves to—a Government which has not proved itself to be either usefully active or decently inactive—that, feeling strongly as I do upon this subject, I have no apology to make for the course which I have adopted. I will endeavor, in the observations which I have to make, to confine myself as much as possible to charges against the Government generally; but it will be my duty, I am afraid, to make some personal observations, especially alluding to the honorable member at the head of the Government. Yet, sir, I am the less reluctant to do this when I recollect that that honorable member is well capable of defending himself against all comers; and also, when I recollect, sir, that it is not unusual for that honorable member, in his speeches, not to deny himself the opportunity of speaking fully and strongly his mind, whether his words bear generally or have a personal tendency. I may as well, here, state that one of my principal objects in taking the course I am now pursuing is to vindicate the dignity of this House and the country, in regard to conduct which took place in the course of the recess, by the policy of the Government. Sir, the history of the present Government is not a long one, but it is a history fraught with more disgraceful acts in its short career than that of any Government which preceded it—and, I hope, of any Government which will succeed it. It commenced, sir, with that scene which was enacted in this House at the commencement of last session, when the honorable member at the head of the Government and the Minister for Works were one day found in each other's embrace, as colleagues, and the next day reviling and traducing each other—when the honorable the Minister for Works was one day a member of the Government, the next occupying a position on the

Opposition benches, and the third day again a member of the Government;—when this House had to suffer the indignity of choosing between a Government, the first action of which was so contemptible, and the sacrificing of the high and important business which was then pending and waiting for the action of Parliament. I remember well, sir, that every honorable member of this House who spoke on that occasion, loudly denounced the conduct of the Government; but the conduct of the Government was condoned by this House—by members generally—in the strong belief that if those honorable members comprising the Government of the day were unscrupulous men, they were business men.

Mr. WALSH: No, no.

Mr. BELL: I believe that the House existed fully under the impression that the members of the Government of the day were men willing to carry, and capable of carrying, out the great business of the country for the interest of the country. But, sir, what followed? For a time, I admit, this House believed that it had made a great "find" in the honorable member at the head of the Government. The sparkling manner in which that honorable member conducted the business of the Assembly was taking; and it was evident that this House had in that honorable member, either a great man or a great fool! Now, sir, I hope that it will not be thought for a moment that I use this epithet towards the honorable member at the head of the Government in its common and general acceptance. I do so for the purpose of contrasting what that honorable member would be if his more important qualities were equal to his volubility. Well, sir, the Premier commenced the business of the session by a declaration in favor of a railway from Ipswich to Brisbane, and he wound up in opposition to that policy.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: No.

Mr. BELL: So much for his consistency.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: No.

Mr. BELL: The honorable member at the head of the Government, with the remainder of his colleagues—I may say, the Government generally—came down to this House with a policy, as introduced through the Speech of His Excellency the Governor, which contained a programme that was satisfactory, in a business point of view, to most members of this House. It was believed, upon reading that programme, that the intention of the Government was honest in regard to that policy, and the House generally set to work to carry out the list of business which had been placed before it. But not long had the session proceeded, no sooner had the House passed the Estimates, than there was an apparent anxiety, a clear indication, on the part of the Government, to draw the session to a close. No sooner had the Government obtained the consent of this House to introduce the Appropriation Bill, than we found

the Premier, assisted by his colleagues—by motions from each of them—discharging rapidly that important portion of the country's business which was still upon the business paper of this House. Sir, the assistance which the honorable the Premier then received at the hands of his colleagues, to wipe out that business which the House required so much and the country demanded so loudly to be done, seemed to me to indicate that the downfall of their leader was at that time contemplated. It was amazing to see the way the business fell through in this House and in another place. The House will be surprised when I read a list of the Bills which were still on the business paper of this House, and which were ruthlessly wiped out, swept away, to close the session, because the Government were dishonest in their intentions with regard to the disposal of the public business. There were—The Bar of Queensland Incorporation Bill, Brands Bill, District Courts Act Amendment Bill, Electoral Revision Bill, Gold Fields Bill, Mercantile Act Amendment Bill, Municipal Boundaries Amendment Bill, Municipal Institutions Act Amendment Bill, Navigation of the River Brisbane Bill, Water Supply Bill, Postage Bill, Law of Entail Amendment Bill. These were all Government measures. Then, among the Bills introduced by private members, there were—The Legal Practitioners Bill, Mon-dure Sheep Destruction Bill, Native Dog Destruction Bill, Selectors Relief Bill, Triennial Parliaments Bill. Now, sir, I ask, was that treating this House fairly? Was it not, I ask again, a swindle? At least, I think it amounts to a swindle, as it seemed to be clearly understood by the honorable member at the head of the Government and his colleagues. Claims for necessary though minor works were refused by the Minister for Public Works, on the understanding that those great measures of public interest would be honestly attended to by the Government. I have no doubt it will be pointed out by the honorable member at the head of the Government and his colleagues, that they were assisted by the House in drawing to a conclusion the business of the session; but I take this opportunity of denying it, as far as an individual member of this House can do so, because I took advantage of every occasion that offered to warn the Government that they were committing a suicidal act. There was dishonesty on the face of it—they never had any intention to carry through the business of the session. It was, no doubt, an agreeable duty to the head of the Government to introduce, as he did, so important and so popular a measure as that which gives free education throughout this colony; and for that, sir, the honorable member rose materially in the estimation of members of this House and of those outside of its walls. But, sir, what disappointment were we subjected to!—We found out ultimately

that that policy was introduced without deliberation—without estimates being gone into—without its cost to the country being ascertained, or the ability of the country to bear it being known. Again, the absence of regulations to meet that policy spread dissatisfaction abroad where no dissatisfaction should have existed; so much so, that the very policy itself was endangered at one time. Well, sir, we were ushered eventually into the recess. I think it will be conceded on all sides of this House, that the recess is the time when the greatest confidence is required in the Government, and especially in a Premier. When this House is sitting, it is in itself a check—it has a sufficient hold upon the most reckless Government, or the most licentious Premier. But, sir, what conduct were we treated to in the course of the recess? I say it was conduct which, if it cannot be made impeachable by this House, was such as I trust will meet the severest censure which this Assembly can pass upon it. I say that if it does not meet with that censure, we, as representatives of the people, are not worthy of the position which has been entrusted to us. If we do not mark our disapprobation of that conduct of the Premier which, in the eyes of every man, woman, and child in the country—aye, in the eyes of the boys, some of whom have been exhorted to follow his example! in the Grammar School—has brought down degradation upon and tarnished that high position which the honorable member has been placed in by the House, we acknowledge that we are worthily and fully represented in the leader we have chosen. I want to know why that honorable member did not resign, to prevent the necessity of this House undertaking the unpleasant duty which is cast upon it this day of vindicating its position and the position of the country. Why did he not take the hint that was given in the meeting called by the members for Brisbane, in this city, and resign at the time, when he would have gained himself the opportunity to purge him of his sins, which, if he filled a private position, he could have done? I say this, because I feel that it is necessarily the duty of some member of this House to do so. I regret much that it has fallen to my lot to do it; but I will, nevertheless, not shrink from the responsibility, and I will not go beyond that duty, I hope. In regard to this Government, as a whole, I ask, in what way can we possibly place the slightest trust in them as to the business which has been brought before us in His Excellency's Speech, to-day? In looking at the composition of this Government, it cannot be doubted that it is of the most heterogeneous character: they are neither true to this House nor true to the country. What can be said of a Government which, last session, came to this House with a placard upon it painted "Retrenchment" and "Expenditure within the Revenue," and yet, in less than one year—

Mr. ATKIN: Six months.

Mr. BELL: We find its members guilty of the very opposite—extravagance and expenditure beyond the revenue? Is not this enough to condemn a Ministry asking for the support of this House? What can be said of a Government which, during the last session, pleaded impecuniosity, and refused small sums to assist inland towns in this colony suffering from time of drought and other unforeseen difficulties, and which same Government, in the course of a few months, is found entering into contracts for a fleet of steamers, at the cost of an enormous sum of money, and steamers that are unnecessary for the business of the country? Can anything be said in excuse of them, except it is that “those whom God intends to destroy, He first deprives of their senses”? I give the honorable member at the head of the Government the full benefit of the application of the Latin phrase, which he can appreciate better than I. Sir, I would ask, what excuse can the Government make for such a position as theirs, now? I ask, is there anything reconcilable in what they have done and what they ought to have done? Nothing, in human reason, so far as we yet know. While, on the one hand, the Government could tell the House and the country, that the colony was in a state of impecuniosity; on the other hand, it spent, or endeavored to spend, without the authority of Parliament, such sums of money as I hope this House will never vote. Is it possible that a perfect mania has arisen for steamers?—originating from that useful steamer, the “Kate”—useful for picnics and other purposes of that kind. She must have proved a perfect whet to the appetite for expenditure of Ministers. I do not understand how they can, as a body, have let themselves so much forget their professions of economy, as that the honorable the Premier, during his absence from the colony, took upon himself the purchase of new vessels. I am not in a position to say, but I trust, that the papers which have been asked for, to-day, will bring out that which the House is anxious to know. Now, I have before me a list of charges against the Government—

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Hear, hear.

Mr. BELL: Which, if I were to go into them *seriatim*, would lengthen much the debate which is now coming on. But there are two or three of them which cannot be passed by. I think the conduct which the Government pursued towards the Australasian Steam Navigation Company in that quarrel, I may call it, between the Government and the company, does not redound in any way to the credit of the Government. I think the manner in which the business was conducted by this Government was in the smallest character that a Government could assume. The course pursued—the conduct of the Government, was the means of widening the breach between the company and the Government.

I think, if there were men conducting that business, without prejudice and unbiassed, there would have been no necessity for the expenditure on the “Blackbird;” there would have been no necessity for closing the Custom House at unusual hours;—there was no necessity for avoiding a legitimate evil which was of smaller consideration than the cost to which the country has been put by the giving effect to the opinions of the Government upon it. Herein are questions which the Government will have to answer, before this House and the country are satisfied upon the point. For myself, I am unable to say what answer can be given to such pettifogging conduct as the Government has been guilty of. We find in the Opening Speech of to-day reference made to the re-distribution of seats in this House. What faith can we have that any such Bill will seriously come before the House? What, I ask, has happened since last session, when the Government were in power, to require, now, a re-distribution of seats, that did not then exist? Why is it that the two-thirds clause requires repealing now? Why did not the Government do it then? This promise of the Speech is not sincere;—there will be no re-distribution if the present Government remains in power; and the two-thirds clause will not be repealed. It is another of those catching appeals which this Government has been accustomed to. I think it would be almost too early, in this stage of the session, to enter into questions purely connected with the Treasurer’s department; but, sir, I would ask, what is meant by that portion of the Speech which refers to the Additional Customs Duties Continuation Act—the fifth clause of the Speech? It is not clear that anything special is meant. It is not clear that the Government have a policy at all. I think, sir, that the most important question which, to-day, impends in this colony is the question of the tariff. If it is the intention of the Treasurer to come down with a proposal for the alteration of the tariff—one that will not have for its object the reduction of the revenue, but one that will have the effect of encouraging the industries of the country, and that will be of advantage to the community—why is it not mentioned in the Speech? This is another of those mysteries of a Government which the House can have no faith in. Now, sir, there is another matter which affects the honorable member at the head of the Government, for which he has had very much censure in the public press—it is the case of Macdonald and Tully. I am not going into that question, at this moment, upon its merits, as we have seen it written upon in the newspapers of the colony. I am not going to say that it is my opinion that the honorable member at the head of the Government is as open to censure as the press says that he is; but this I say, that if a question is raised upon the point, I think the honor-

able and learned member might thoroughly clear his way with some argument on his side. When I come to the next step of that action, which followed the verdict of the jury, we find that the consequence is an additional lawyer in the Cabinet.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: No.

Mr. BELL: I have no hesitation in saying that there are a great deal too many lawyers in the Cabinet. Unless you refer it to that case, what could have brought about such an arrangement as now exists between the honorable and learned members, Mr. Lilley and Mr. Pring?—the Box and Cox of the country: or, rather, they were doing the opposite of Box and Cox; they were acting the part of Mrs. Bouncer, as they got whole pay for two occupants. It used to be that they fairly divided the pay of the Crown Law adviser between them, getting £500 a year each; but now they are bagging the lot of £1,000 each. It is impossible that they can consistently hold together in the same Government, or that the other members of the Government can consider the great questions which come before them, affecting the welfare of the country, as men united and as members of the same Cabinet should do. They are an incongruous lot that should be separated as soon as possible, and that should never come together again. It matters not to me how this amendment is settled. I have, perhaps, spoken too strongly: I regret it, if I have done so. I feel strongly. I felt that it was somebody's duty to come forward; and why should I not take it upon myself as well as another? I shall not trouble the House further, but will leave it to other members who will follow me, ere the debate is concluded, to deal with the great and important questions that arise. Sir, I shall not be at all surprised, when the honorable member at the head of the Government comes to reply, if he will tell this House that all the charges I have made against him are vapidous imaginations. I have not brought down, to-day, any proofs of the correctness of the charges which I have made. I only say, in anticipation of that reply, first of all, that it is not my intention to bring any proof; second, if it is wanting, I believe it will be found in the hands of those who will follow me in this debate; third, that the principle on which I ground my opposition, namely—that if the charges are charges requiring evidence, they are not of the importance that I intended this motion should give to them. I say, there is a charge based upon public scandal known to several members of this House; I say, if there is a single member in the House who requires evidence to be brought to him, he has no right to vote for my amendment. But, I think, there is not a member who will not vote for it on that ground. I will now read the amendment:—

We beg respectfully to submit to your Excellency that it is essential for securing satis-

factory 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.

Mr. EDMONDSTONE, in seconding the amendment, declined to say anything further upon the question, as there were honorable members to follow who would speak more upon it than he could do.

After a prolonged pause, during which there were repeated cries of "Question, question," from the Opposition and Cross Benches,

Mr. WALSH said that, as the Government appeared to be totally unable to answer the charges made against them that afternoon, he would suggest that they should move the adjournment of the House in order to afford themselves an opportunity of preparing some kind of defence.

Mr. GROOM said he believed it was customary on occasions of this kind—when a motion had been proposed involving a vote of want of confidence in the Government—for some member of the Ministry to rise and reply to the statements made by the mover of that motion. There were possibly exceptional cases, but that was the customary practice, and it should at least have been followed on the present occasion, when a direct vote of want of confidence had been moved, and for the first time in the history of Parliamentary Government in Queensland, honorable members had had the spectacle presented to them of a Premier moving the adoption of his own Address in Reply to the Opening Speech. That was certainly an exceptional circumstance, and he thought some explanation was necessary in order to relieve the Government, and the country, from such an undignified position. The conduct of the Government had been the subject of much comment throughout the colony, but honorable members had only hearsay evidence, upon which to form their conclusions; and he was one of those who was anxious that the Government should have an opportunity of refuting the grave charges preferred against them. That opportunity was now afforded. The honorable member for Northern Downs had brought forward a definite motion, and had embodied the terms employed on a similar occasion, some three or four years ago, by the present Attorney-General when in opposition to the Ministry of the day. He was anxious, he repeated, to hear some reply from the Government, and was quite at a loss to understand why it should be withheld; since honorable members, who wished to hear both sides of the question before it went to the vote, were not at present in the position to discuss it, as they would otherwise be. He, among others, had taken exception to the action of the Government, and he would com-

mence by taking exception to their conduct at the close of the last session. Members of the House, no doubt, exercised a joint responsibility with the Government up to the time of prorogation, and if they allowed the session to close without passing certain necessary measures, they were responsible that those measures did not become law of the land. But they were not responsible for the action of the Government as involved in the prorogation Speech, and he would draw the attention of honorable members to one question which never came before the House at all. When the vote for education was brought forward, the honorable member for Maryborough, who was generally very jealous over the public purse, was the only one who drew the attention of the House to the probable expenditure which would arise from that vote, and its effect upon public education throughout the colony. Now, he thought the Government might have furnished the House, at the close of the session, with the information that it was their intention to introduce a system of free education, on the first of January, 1870. But the prorogation Speech contained not a word of that intention; the House had no intimation of it whatever, and he believed that even the Board of Education were not consulted as to whether such a scheme was desirable or necessary to the country. If that were the case, surely the House was entitled to some information in reference to the reasons which induced the Government to introduce a system of free education during the recess; and he thought any person who had read the admirable speech of Mr. Forster, in introducing the Primary Education Bill in the House of Commons, must admit that the arguments it contained applied still more forcibly to this country; and especially the argument that it was unfair on the part of the State, to relieve parents from their moral and social obligations. Not a single petition, as far as he was aware, had been presented to the House in favor of free education; and what had been the result of its introduction? He was not aware that it had in any way increased the facilities for education, or that children had obtained education who could not obtain it before. It had, however, had this effect—it had caused a number of parents who found their children an encumbrance to send them to the National schools, until it had been found necessary to decline to receive any children under five years of age. He was aware of that from instances which had occurred in the town in which he lived. He was quite as much in favor of public education as the Premier, and he would support him in any Government who would bring forward a comprehensive system of education, adapted to the colony. He had been a close observer of the system in force in New South Wales, and had furnished himself with the annual and progress reports issued in that colony;

and he felt convinced that if a similar broad and liberal scheme were carried out in Queensland, there would be no necessity to introduce a system of free education. He did not believe in free education, and it was patent that, at the present time, in the face of a decreasing revenue and a decreasing population, there could be no necessity for it: it was a scheme which the House had never been asked to support, and it had been introduced without their knowledge. He did not intend to go further into the question of free education, and he would only add, that he believed it would involve the country in an extra expenditure of something like £10,000 a year, incurred without the sanction of Parliament. Honorable members had no doubt read a recent despatch from Lord Granville, on the subject of unauthorised expenditure, in which the Governor of New South Wales was told that it would be better for him to come into collision with his Ministers, than to sanction expenditure not authorised by the Legislature of the colony. He should like to know why this scheme had been introduced. Was it to secure a sort of ephemeral popularity—to prop up the failing popularity of the present Ministry? The House and the country, he maintained, had a right to know whether that were the case or not. Then he came to the Address, with which the House had been entertained that morning. Honorable members had been told that they would be asked to sanction the extension of the railway from Ipswich to Brisbane; but they were told the very same thing at the commencement of the previous session. Perhaps not in such distinct and definite terms; but there could be no doubt the "economical extensions" referred to, included the completion of the line to Brisbane, although the expression, being an ambiguous one, might be interpreted in various ways. It was, however, distinctly understood that the extension of the railway to the metropolis was to be carried out; and he contended that it was the duty of the Government, at that time, to bring the question before the House, and, at all events, ask their sanction to the undertaking. It was quite as much called for then as it was now, especially in face of the fact that, according to the quarterly printed returns to the 31st March of this year, they were informed that, making reasonable allowances for certain extraordinary land sales, there would be a decrease of £40,000 in the land revenue. When the House met last year, there was no decrease whatever in the revenue from this source; for, according to the statement made by the Colonial Treasurer, it was even expected that there would be some surplus; so that the country was in a better position last year to afford the expense of this work. If, therefore, at the close of the session of 1869, it was not thought advisable to carry out these "economical extensions," how could

they believe the Government to be sincere in their desire to carry them out in 1870? He was only arguing from reasonable deductions, in the absence of any answer whatever from the Government to the allegations contained in the speech of the honorable member for Northern Downs. Now, with regard to other questions, honorable members had been told that they would be asked to support a Bill for the repeal of the two-thirds clause—for that was what was meant, in reality. Again, why was that not done last session? He had a distinct recollection that the honorable member for West Moreton, Mr. Forbes, did introduce a Bill for the repeal of the two-thirds clause last session; and it was then stated, and the statement was not contradicted, that the Bill would have to be referred to Her Majesty for her assent before any action could be taken upon it. Well, if that measure were of so much importance, why was it not brought forward last year? The same necessity must have existed then, because the country were put to the expense—some £4,000 or £5,000—of preparing a census for the express purpose of pointing out the inequalities of the existing representation. It was one of the charges against the late Government that they did not take action in this matter after having gone to the expense of preparing a census. He would, then, ask, had the present Government been faithful in carrying out their promises? If so, why did they not support the Bill introduced by the honorable member for West Moreton, that it might have been sent home for Her Majesty's approval?—and then, during the present session, the House might have been asked to consider a re-distribution scheme. Honorable members were also told in the Speech—

“The Additional Customs Duties Continuation Act will expire on the 31st December next, and you will be advised to reconsider its provisions early in the present session.”

Now, that was a very ambiguous expression, and he should have liked to see something clearer and more definite. It reminded him of the term “economical extensions.” It was generally customary in the mother-country, just before the meeting of Parliament, for some members of the Ministry—perhaps some of the subordinate members—to meet their constituents, and to give them some inkling of the forthcoming Ministerial policy; and he would take the opportunity of noticing that the honorable Secretary for Works had recently addressed his constituents, and had given them some inkling of what the Government intended to do with the tariff. Now, he thought it would have been well if some intimation of the Government policy in that respect had been introduced into the Speech. He believed that honorable gentleman (Secretary for Works) was a convert to protection; for he believed

he had gone so far as to tell his constituents at Allora that he should advocate a tax upon flour and other agricultural imports. Would it not have been better to state, in distinct terms, the intentions of the Government on this subject? It was said that “coming events cast their shadows before them.” He did not mean to say that the honorable member had advocated the principle of protection, because he had expected the present amendment on the Address would be moved, and perhaps carried; but rather that the statement was made in his Ministerial character, as a part of the policy with which the Government would come down to the House. There was another question in reference to which he should like to hear some explanation. He referred to the allegations made against the Minister for Lands of maladministration of the Land Act. He was prepared to state, at once, without even hearing the defence of that honorable member, that he did not consider he had at all exceeded his privilege in the selections he had made on Cecil Plains. But he was prepared to make this statement—that the honorable member did exceed his privilege when he placed such large areas of land in the market for public sale. There was no disguising the fact that these lands were put up for sale in such large blocks that no person could, by any possibility, contend against the honorable member. He would ask, what demand was there for these lands? He had been taught to believe that the Government held the public lands in trust for the whole colony; and they were not supposed to rush them into the market, in order to gratify the whims or caprices of any particular persons. Now, in the land sale he especially referred to, it was found that the Messrs. Gore, of Yandilla, bought the lion's share, and that the honorable James Taylor also purchased a very large quantity. Beyond these two parties, very few of the public evinced the slightest desire to acquire the land. It might be that this land was utterly unsuitable for agricultural purposes, and would never have been asked for for that purpose; but that was not the question which the House had to consider. It was this—here was a responsible Minister, responsible to the House and the country for the due discharge of the trust reposed in him; this land was on his own run, and he had thrust it into the market when there was no demand for it on the part of the public, purchased it himself, and paid for the greater portion of it in land orders. Why, when the Land Bill was passed, the present Minister for Lands was the very person to rise up and protest against this very system; and he maintained that that honorable member should not have involved his colleagues in his action, but, if he desired to obtain the land, should have resigned his position and gone into the land office as a private individual. He (Mr. Groom) had always been of opinion

that so long as a squatter occupied the position of Minister for Lands, so long would he give dissatisfaction, and especially as far as the Darling Downs was concerned. It had been a matter of regret with him that Mr. Archer had not accepted the position of Minister for Lands, for he believed that gentleman would have given satisfaction. It was true that he was also a squatter, but not as far as the Darling Downs was concerned; and he believed he would have acted impartially. It was an unfortunate circumstance for the country and for the honorable member, Mr. Taylor, himself, that he should have been the owner of the run in which these large areas had been put up for sale. He did not wish to charge the honorable member with impartiality; but he must say that, as the facts went forth to the world, he was placed in a very unsatisfactory position, as a Minister of the Crown, in disposing of such a large quantity of land, which appeared to have been put up to suit his own convenience, and not the convenience of the public. It was unfortunate for the Government that they had vouchsafed no answer to the speech of the honorable member for Northern Downs, as members could only discuss the charges brought against them from what they heard out of doors. They had heard a good deal about the contract between the Government and Mr. Mort, of Sydney. It was stated that an order had been given for the construction of three steamers, in order to put down the monopoly of the A.S.N. Company. Then it was stated that a compromise had been made, and only one steamer was to be supplied; and then, that if Mr. Mort received £3,000, the contract would be annulled; and then, again, that it was part and parcel of the agreement entered into with the company that they were to take these steamers off the hands of the Government. Now, which of those was the true version of the story? In any case, the transaction did not redound to the credit of the Government; because the House had never been asked to give their opinion on the subject. The Government could not say their attention had not been called to this question; because the honorable member for West Moreton, Mr. Thorn, before the close of the session, had directed their attention to the unseemly quarrel with the A.S.N. Company, and had suggested the means by which it might be put a stop to. But what had been the result? Every attempt had been made to obstruct the company; steamers had been ordered in Sydney; and finally a contract had been made with the company again. On this question the House were certainly entitled to some information from the Government. It could not be supposed that the representatives of the people could quietly acquiesce in every arrangement the Ministry chose to make without their sanction or authority. He did not

say that he would promise to vote for the amendment of the honorable member for Northern Downs, and he was prepared to give his reasons. It was possible he might vote for it, but he had made a promise to listen patiently to the explanation which the Government might have to give upon these matters. He thought the country had a right to know whether these flying rumors which were circulating throughout the country—north, south, east, and west—through the press, had any foundation. They were derogatory to the House as well as to the Government; and considering the temperate and amicable way in which the honorable member for Northern Downs had couched his speech, he thought the Government, in common courtesy, to say nothing of constitutional practice, could do no less than reply to them. He did not hesitate to say that if the allegations of that honorable member were unanswered, he should unquestionably vote with him. He should do so without scruple, for he was no place hunter; the position he occupied was that of an independent member. As a representative of the people, he was not prepared to allow the public money to be spent without authority, either for free education, or for building steamers in Sydney at the cost of the colony, in which so many mechanics were languishing for want of employment. Unless, therefore, the charges made against the Government were answered, he should, at the conclusion of the debate, consider it his duty to vote for the amendment.

Cries of "Question, question," from several honorable members.

No other honorable member having risen to speak, the question was put—

That the words proposed to be added be so added.

And the House divided.

Ayes, 17.		Noes, 6.	
Dr. O'Doherty	}	Mr. Taylor	} Tellers.
Mr. Murphy		" Lilley	
" Bell		" Stephens	
" Atkin		" Jordan	
" Thorn		" Pring	
" Ramsay		" Macalister	
" Williams			
" Thompson			
" Miles			
" Hodgson			
" Fraser			
" Royds			
" Edmundstone			
" Groom			
" Forbes			
" Palmer			
" Walsh			

The Address, as amended, was then adopted, and, on the motion of the PREMIER, the House adjourned until eleven o'clock to-morrow, for the purpose of presenting the Address to His Excellency the Governor.