

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 1870

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Tuesday, 15 November, 1870.

Opening of Parliament.—New Speaker.

OPENING OF PARLIAMENT.

The House met at 12 o'clock this day, pursuant to proclamation, and shortly afterwards proceeded to the Legislative Council Chamber to hear the Commission read opening the Parliament; and, being returned—

The Clerk read a Commission from His Excellency the Governor, authorising the Honorable A. H. Palmer, the Honorable W.

H. Walsh, and the Honorable J. M. Thompson to administer the oath to members elect. Honorable members present having taken the oath and subscribed to the roll, the House proceeded to the election of a Speaker.

NEW SPEAKER.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY moved—

That the Honorable Arthur Macalister do take the Chair of this House as Speaker.

He said it might perhaps appear strange that, in proposing a Speaker for the acceptance of honorable members, he should name a gentleman to whom he had always acted in opposition since he had been a member of the House; but having satisfied himself from his own experience, and from what he had heard of the previous career of the honorable member (Mr. Macalister), that that gentleman was fully competent, from his long experience in the forms and rules of the House, to occupy the Chair as Speaker and to preserve the dignity of the House; and believing, as he did, that the honorable gentleman would, in his administration of the Speakership, be thoroughly impartial, he had no hesitation in proposing a political opponent. It might be objected that a member who, since the separation of this colony, had always taken an active part, either on one side or the other, in political proceedings, might not be expected to make a strictly impartial Speaker. Without entering upon that question, he would just point to the honorable example to the contrary supplied by a neighboring colony, where it had been shown that active or even violent partisanship as a member did not prevent a thoroughly honorable man, when placed in the chair as Speaker, from discharging his duties in a conscientious and impartial manner. He alluded to the present Speaker of the New South Wales Parliament, who, it was well known, had been for many years of his life a strong political partisan, and against whose impartial discharge of the duties of his office as Speaker not a doubt had ever been breathed. He believed the honorable gentleman he now proposed would fulfil the same duties with equal impartiality. He believed him, from his long experience, to be thoroughly capable of discharging them with credit to himself and satisfaction to the House. The honorable member was no tyro in legislation. Long before Separation he had taken his part in the public affairs of the colony of which Queensland was then a part, having been a member of the House of Representatives in Sydney for the Moreton districts; and ever since the inauguration of responsible government in this colony he had been a member of its Legislative Assembly. He had also held various responsible offices in the Ministry—in fact, he had held every office except those of Treasurer, Postmaster-General, and Attorney-General, under the Crown. He had always taken an active part in the politics of the country, and it being his wish now to

occupy the Chair of the House as Speaker, he (the Colonial Secretary), could only say that he knew no one who, in his opinion, was more capable or more entitled to fill it. It was a matter for the honorable member's own consideration whether the retirement of the Chair was more suited to him than the busy turmoil of politics; with that the House had nothing to do. Believing, therefore, that the Honorable Arthur Macalister would be a most efficient Speaker, he had great pleasure in moving that he do take the Chair of this House.

Mr. KING said he had great pleasure in seconding the motion, and that pleasure was enhanced by the belief that the previous career of the honorable gentleman (Mr. Macalister) in that House was a sufficient guarantee to honorable members that the duties of the office would be discharged with ability and impartiality. He might remind the House that, in the Imperial Parliament, which was the highest example, the office of Speaker was considered of the greatest importance, and that no member was selected to fill it who did not stand in the highest estimation, and who was also well acquainted with the rules and forms of the House. To choose a member whose sole qualification should be that he would not be missed from either side of the House—although for some reasons it might be expedient—would not reflect credit upon the proceedings of the House; for it would be vain to expect for a member whose influence would be so small, that implicit obedience which the Speaker of the House had a right to demand. As the honorable member at the head of the Government had stated, the honorable member he had proposed, Mr. Macalister, had held a high position in that Assembly, and had also filled various responsible offices under the Crown, and he believed there were very few members present who were as well qualified to take the Chair as Speaker. The lengthened experience which the honorable member had obtained, which was not confined to Queensland alone, would be peculiarly desirable, not only because in this colony parliamentary institutions were as yet but imperfectly understood, but also because there were a great many new members. For these reasons, it was essential that a Speaker should be chosen whose authority and influence should be more than ordinary; and as he believed the honorable member for Eastern Downs to possess the desired qualifications, he seconded the motion with much pleasure.

Mr. GROOM said he had heard with much astonishment the motion moved by the honorable the Premier, and he felt perfectly sure that astonishment would be equalled, if not exceeded, by that felt by a large majority of the public of Queensland, when they saw the public journals on the following day. If peace was to be obtained by sacrifice, he was convinced that this sacrifice would be regarded with great dissatisfaction and regret by a great

many people outside. He had not the slightest hesitation in stating from his own local knowledge that no constituency in the colony required its representative to be on the floor of the House more than that of Eastern Downs. They were a very stirring community in that district, who had a powerful monied interest and a system of dummied to contend with; and he had been informed by three or four influential members of that constituency that the honorable member, Mr. Macalister, had himself given a pledge that if the office of Speaker were offered to him he would not accept it. Whether that was true or not, he could not say. He had the authority of three or four of the honorable gentleman's constituents for saying so. Of course, the honorable member had not accepted it as yet. He desired to point out to the honorable the Premier that the example he had quoted to the House was not at all analogous to the present case. The present Speaker of the New South Wales Parliament had filled the office of Secretary for Works in a previous administration, which was a very different position from that of leader of the Opposition. What was the position in which honorable members on the Opposition benches would be placed? When the Premier convoked the late Parliament, a meeting of those members was held, and the honorable member for Eastern Downs was selected as their leader, and he, in common with the sixteen or seventeen who voted with him, drafted the amendments which resulted in the defeat of the Government. There could not be a doubt that the amendments of the honorable member formed the rallying cry of his friends, and that the votes given by the honorable member, and the principles he had enunciated, represented the policy of the party who had chosen him as their leader. In the speech delivered by the honorable member at Warwick he had advocated a system of railways and an extension of the line from Dalby to the Gulf of Carpentaria. On that occasion he had designated the honorable gentleman who now proposed him as one who was bankrupt in common sense and unworthy of the position he held, and said it was high time he should be sent about his business and an abler man selected. Honorable members on his (Mr. Groom's) side of the House, believed what the honorable member said to his constituents, and, thinking he was fully prepared to carry out his promises, cheerfully surrounded him, and agreed that he should be their mouth-piece and their exponent of the views he had so ably advocated before his constituents. The late elections, as far as the southern portions of the colony were concerned, had resulted in a large majority for the Opposition; and had it not been for certain circumstances which need not be named on the present occasion, a complete majority for the Opposition would have been returned to the present Parliament.

As one who had supported the honorable member in the different positions he had held in that House, he could not allow this motion to pass without protesting against it. He did not know whether the honorable member expected this motion, or whether he had been urged to accept it because of the disorganized state of the Opposition. If the Opposition was disorganized he was sorry to hear it; but that, he thought, was the strongest reason why the honorable member should exert himself to carry out the principles he had enunciated before his constituents. He (Mr. Groom) felt sorry to propose an amendment on the motion before the House, but he considered it his duty to do so, in order that the electors might know whether the honorable member had accepted the position at their desire, or merely of his own choice. No doubt they expected him to occupy a seat in that House, but it was to represent their interests and to advocate the principles he had enunciated before them, which he would be unable to do as Speaker; and he would venture to prophesy—so well did he know the district of Eastern Downs—that if the honorable member accepted the office, he would be called upon by his constituents, before forty-eight hours had passed, to resign his seat. He would not take up the time of the House by making any further observations, but would move, as an amendment,—

That the name of the Honorable Arthur Macalister be omitted, and that of Frederick Augustus Forbes, Esquire, be inserted in its stead.

The Hon. A. MACALISTER rose and said, that as he saw no intention on the part of any other honorable member to come forward as candidate for the office of Speaker, and as his name had been proposed, he felt it incumbent upon him to make one or two observations. He did not think the House would expect him to take the slightest notice of what had been stated by the honorable member for Drayton and Toowoomba. His honorable colleague the member for Warwick, the most important town in the Eastern Downs, was perfectly aware of what he had told his constituents. It could not be supposed for one moment that in his address to the electors he had ever pledged himself not to accept the office of Speaker if it should be offered to him. In point of fact, it was not until a very recent date that the impression that he should accept the office was created in his mind, and it was not until he had arrived at the conviction that he might be of more service to the House in that capacity than he could be said to be as leader of the Opposition, that he had been induced to make up his mind that if the Government and the House generally intended to support him he should not refuse to take the Chair of the House. He had held no communication with the

Government on the subject at that time. Whatever was done in bringing his name forward as a candidate had been done by his friends out of doors. He certainly had not been aware that it was intended to make this a party or political question. He had always regarded the election of a Speaker as a question which should not be decided upon political grounds. The honorable member who filled that important post should be acquainted with the duties it involved, and be able to discharge them efficiently, and the House should have sufficient confidence in him to feel that he would do so in an impartial and independent manner. He believed that the reasons which induced the House to look upon him as a person suited to that office at the present time were probably—in the first place, an aptitude on his part for the discharge of its duties; and in the second place, probably, as the honorable Colonial Secretary had stated, the testimony of his fitness, which a long parliamentary career had afforded. Regarding the matter in this light—and in this light only could he regard it—and looking upon the office of Speaker as one of the highest dignity and importance, he felt he should ill discharge the duty he owed to the House, if he were to refuse to accept the offer which had been so handsomely made to him. There was one objection, he might observe, in connection with it, which had arisen in his mind within the last hour or two, and that was that—as he had commenced his parliamentary career in this colony along with the venerable and honorable gentleman who had so long worthily occupied the Chair—if he were not getting old, at least he was not growing young again. In submitting himself to the House, he would remark that it was impossible for any Speaker to insist upon the due observance of the rules and forms of Parliament, unless he received the support of the House. Without that support his efforts would be useless, nor could he perform his duty with credit to himself or satisfaction to honorable members. He had no doubt that the same support which had been accorded to the late Speaker would be given to his successor. He believed that, if elected, he should approach his duties with a reasonable amount of understanding and sound judgment. There was another question in connection with the action of the House to which he would just refer. It was important, not as regarded himself, but as affecting the dignity of the House. It was, of course, impossible for a Speaker, having the natural failings which all men possessed, not to be in error now and then. What he would say to the House therefore was that, although he should at times commit an error, and the House should be satisfied that he had not exercised a clear understanding or sound judgment upon some question or other, that honorable members, who would be perfectly justified in exercising their privileges on such

occasions, should do so, so as to avoid anything like an altercation between the House and the Speaker. He now begged to submit himself to the House.

The Hon. the SPEAKER having been escorted to the Chair by the mover and seconder of the motion, and having made his acknowledgment to the House of the honor conferred upon him,

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said it only remained for him to offer his congratulations to the honorable Speaker, and to express a hope that at the close of his tenure of office, he would continue to enjoy the esteem and confidence of the House, which had been so fully possessed by his predecessor. In expressing this wish, he could say little more, as he was sure that no Speaker had ever retired who had been more esteemed and respected in the discharge of the duties of his office. He had only to inform the House that His Excellency the Governor would be prepared to receive the new Speaker, at Government House, at eleven o'clock on the following day.

The House then adjourned.