

Queensland



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[Hansard]

Legislative Council

WEDNESDAY, 7 DECEMBER 1870

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

*Wednesday, 7 December, 1870.**Civil List Amendment Bill.—Speaker's Pension Bill.*

CIVIL LIST AMENDMENT BILL.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL, in moving the second reading of a Bill to amend the Civil List annexed to the Constitution Act of 1867, observed that it would hardly become him to say much about the measure. He might explain that it was a Bill to reduce the salaries of Ministers of the Crown. It appeared necessary to the present Ministry that reductions in the public expenditure should take place, and they thought that the best way for them to act was to begin with themselves; and that, then, others could not complain of being reduced. Ministers did not think that £1,000 a year was too much for the work they performed. His honorable friend opposite, Mr. Gore, would remember that, on a former occasion, the matter was gone into, and he (the Postmaster-General) then expressed his views that—he always felt, and his honorable friend felt—the Minister representing the Government in the Council should be on an equality with other Ministers. The Bill provided for this.

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: He might state, at the outset, that he would not oppose the Bill. When a similar measure was introduced to the House three or four years since, he opposed it; his reason for so doing being something the same as that the honorable the Postmaster-General gave now—that he thought £1,000 a year was not too much for any gentleman who gave up his time to the Government. He thought so still. If he mistook not, the honorable gentleman who was now at the head of the Government was one of the Ministry who formerly introduced a similar Bill. The Ministry of the day were not sincere when they introduced that measure, because he (Mr. Fitz) knew two of the

then Ministers who stated, in his presence, that, to shew their consistency, they would pass the Bill through the Assembly, but they trusted that the Upper House would throw it out. He felt convinced that the head of the present Government was sincere in introducing the Bill, and that he was strongly supported by his colleagues; but, when the Government allowed the country to believe that they were holding office for the benefit of the public only—from purely patriotic motives—when they had the power in their own hands, they should have introduced a measure for the permanent benefit of this colony; they ought to have gone further than they had with the Bill. His reason for saying this, was, that, after the scenes which had taken place in another branch of the Legislature—in another place—it was very evident that a scramble for office was substituted for the real work of legislation in this colony, much the same as in other colonies. The Government might have gone further, to reduce not only salaries, and so make it not worth while to scramble for office, but to reduce the number of Ministers. Four Ministers, the number ought to be. They were quite sufficient to govern this colony, especially when Queensland was compared with the other colonies. In New South Wales, with a population of 470,000, there were only six Ministers—it might be said that there were seven, but one was a non-political office—and a House of 75 members. In Victoria, with a population of 650,000, and with a House of 78 members, there were ten Ministers. In this colony, with a population of 100,000 or 110,000, four Ministers were quite sufficient. The Government should have reduced the number of Ministers to four, instead of introducing a Bill to give £800 a year to six. They might easily dispense with two Ministers, instead of clapping on additions. The principal men in carrying on the government work were the Under Secretaries, and they were the best men. If there were under secretaries in the departments, good men, and well paid, he saw no reason why one Minister could not be the political head of two departments—of the Works and the Lands, as they were previously; and, although he, Mr. Fitz, should be sorry to part with their friend the honorable the Postmaster-General, he could not see why that honorable gentleman should not return whence he came, and take the office he held as a non-political one. And, if the Government had sent their Attorney-General to the Council, then they could have effected a saving to the colony of, perhaps, £2,000 a year. As the Government professed to go in for economy, he (Mr. Fitz) thought the Council would have received a better Bill from them, than the one before them; and, caring nothing for office themselves, the Government could have placed the offices and emoluments of Ministers in such a shape,

legally, as would prevent, for the future, such scrambling for office as had been seen.

The Hon. F. I. C. BROWNE said, that although he did not feel inclined to follow the honorable gentleman who had just sat down, in censuring the Government for not having reduced the number of Ministers, still he was glad to express his hope also, that the time was not far distant, when from the expressions of feeling that had been given in another place, the two offices of Minister for Lands and Minister for Works, might be amalgamated. There was a strong feeling in the country, and amongst many honorable members of the other House, which feeling was, to some extent, adopted by the Ministry, that in the expenditure for roads and other local works, the money should be entrusted to local hands. If a system of local boards could be carried out fully, he was satisfied that great benefit would accrue to the colony generally. Then, he conceived, there would be so little work for a Minister for Works, that the department under him should be combined with that of the Minister for Lands, as it had been before. There was an Under Secretary for Works and Commissioner for Railways, who certainly could do all the work of the railway department. He (Mr. Browne) hoped that the Government would be able to carry out that principle of entrusting moneys for roads in the hands of those parties who were interested in seeing them properly disbursed. Not only would the localities in which the money was expended have the full worth of it—it would be their own fault if they had not—but the Government would be relieved of a great deal of trouble in administering local affairs, and in carrying out works which would be much better done under local supervision. There would not be so much of what was called “red-tapeism,” or the details of official business;—he alluded, more especially, to the circumstance, that when works were ordered in different localities, there was a great amount of correspondence from the localities down to the Minister of the department, and from the department back again, by which a great deal of time was lost. All that would be saved, and a great amount of work taken off the Works Department by such a change, and that Minister's “occupation” would be “gone.”

The question was put and passed.

SPEAKER'S PENSION BILL.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL, in moving the second reading of a Bill to grant an annuity or pension to Gilbert Elliott, Esquire, in consideration of his services as Speaker, explained its object, and paid a compliment to the honorable gentleman who had so long and ably filled the Speaker's chair in the Legislative Assembly, from the date of the meeting of the first Parliament of Queensland to the close of the fourth Parliament, last year. He

could safely say, no public office had been better filled, and no servant of the country so well spoken of.

The Hon. C. B. WHISH said he should not oppose the Bill, but would remind honorable members that it was no use saying that the Bill would not be referred to as a precedent. He objected altogether to pensions. In England and other countries where pensions were granted, yearly payments were taken out of the salaries of those who received them; that was, if a public officer was to have a pension on retirement from service, so much a-year was levied on his salary, and deducted from it. He knew it was said that the present Bill was not to form a precedent; but, unfortunately, it would be a precedent established, and rather a bad one. It did not appear to him that the Bill had a leg to stand on. It stated that the gentleman in question—of course, honorable members would believe that it did not matter to him (Captain Whish) whether he was the Honorable Gilbert Elliott or John Smith—had rendered eminent services to the colony; but honorable members were not in the Council to indulge sentimental feelings, but to give their opinions on the merits of the case. No mention was made of the return for those services. He (Captain Whish) believed that a salary of £800 a-year had been enjoyed for ten years, for those services. And, those services were certainly, not continuous. The gentleman in question could not, in the first instance, have dreamt that he would be allowed to enjoy his position unmolested for several years. His being continued in that position was a recognition of his services. In the event of any future application being made for a pension, honorable members who voted for the present Bill would scarcely be at liberty to act otherwise than they did now.

The Hon. ST. G. R. GORE said that, as far as he was concerned, he was very much pleased with what had fallen from his honorable friend on the other side of the House, Captain Whish. He did not mean to say anything of the manner in which the late Speaker of the Legislative Assembly had carried himself through so long an occupancy of a difficult position; but, he would say, that his services had been very well paid, indeed; and also, that they were not of such a nature as to prevent him from pursuing his fortune in another way, at the same time—they did not, by any means, take up his time exclusively. He (Mr. Gore) could agree with his honorable friend that the Bill was not to be drawn into a precedent. As far as he was concerned, this was the last case in which he should vote for the recognition of any services that had been paid for.

The Hon. J. F. McDOUGALL: He could not think that this would, or could, or ever should, form a precedent, because, he contended, this was an exceptional case. The

gentleman for whom the Bill provided a pension had had to inaugurate, and preside over, the Legislative Assembly of this colony when Separation took place from New South Wales. He (Mr. McDougall) thought, therefore, that his case was entirely an exceptional one, to say nothing of the manner in which the honorable gentleman had performed his duties for so many years. He did not think that the payment the honorable gentleman had received was too much; and he could not agree with his honorable friend, Captain Whish, who thought that this would form a precedent. He could safely say that it never should, in his case; as he should not consent to its being a precedent for any future Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

The Hon. E. I. C. BROWNE: He might point out that his honorable friend, Captain Whish, was not correct when he said that in England and elsewhere all pensions were dependent upon some reduction in salary. That was not the case. Upon the Speaker's salary, at home, no such reduction was made. The Speaker received £6,000 a year; and when he retired, at the proper time, it was with a peerage and a pension—he (Mr. Browne) thought it was £2,000 a year, but he was not quite sure about it. Pensions, at home, did not arise out of corresponding reductions of salary.

Question put and passed.