

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

THURSDAY, 4 JULY 1872

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Thursday, 4 July, 1872.

Soundings of the River Brisbane. — Railway Survey.—
Appropriation Bill.

SOUNDINGS OF THE RIVER BRISBANE.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said: Honorable gentlemen—I am commanded by His Excellency the Governor to state, that His Excellency laid the address from the Legislative Council, dated 12th June, before his responsible advisers; and I beg to inform the House that Captain Bedwell, of the colonial surveying ship "Pearl," having been communicated with on the subject, has intimated his intention of commencing an immediate survey of the river; and, as soon as the particulars referred to in the address have been ascertained, the result will be made known to you.

RAILWAY SURVEYS.

Upon the reading of the Order of the Day, for the consideration of the message from the Legislative Assembly, transmitting resolutions affirming the desirableness of expenditure in additional surveys of railway lines,

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL rose and said that his honorable friends in the Council would be glad to see this question on the paper. As they were well aware, the line between Ipswich and Brisbane had been already surveyed, he believed, three or four times. But it was considered desirable—and the Royal Commission that sat some time ago

considered—that another survey should take place, and the best route be ascertained. He had no doubt that money would be saved thereby. Honorable members would see that the line from Westwood to the Mackenzie River, also, was to be surveyed. The line would end at Lurline, where the two roads for Springsure and Clermont branched off. Clermont was about eighty miles distant, and Springsure about fifty miles. The whole of the traffic of the neighboring districts would be taken by that northern line. In fact, matters were already in train, and he had no doubt that before many days, the surveys would be commenced or initiated. He begged now to move that the resolutions of the Legislative Assembly be agreed to:—

"1. That it is desirable that the Government should be authorised to expend a sum not exceeding £8,000 in additional surveys of railway lines from Brisbane to Ipswich, and Westwood to the Mackenzie River; such amount to be charged to Loan Unforeseen Expenditure, in the first instance, and to Railway Loan when voted.

"2. That an Address be presented to the Governor, praying that His Excellency will be pleased to recommend to this House the necessary appropriation to give effect to the foregoing resolution."

The Hon. H. B. Fitz said he wished to offer a few remarks with reference to the resolutions. They involved a very important question, though upon the first blush it appeared to be a simple one; and, if honorable members would give themselves the trouble to look into it, they would see that it was much more serious than they might at first be inclined to believe. The House must not lose sight of the facts attaching to the question. Taking a retrospective view of the Brisbane Railway, they were all perfectly aware that it had been for a great many years a very vexed question in colonial politics, and one in reference to which various Governments had found the greatest difficulty in carrying on, without, to use a homely but somewhat vulgar expression, resorting to "a little dodging." He might state, in the first instance, that when Mr. Macalister was at the head of the Government, the honorable gentleman found he was almost between two stools: he could not carry on the Government unless he took some action with reference to this subject. His Brisbane supporters in the other House would not give their adhesion to his Government unless he took some action with reference to the railway; and he thought that the only thing he could do was to take some steps in that direction; and so he arranged with the Engineer-in-Chief of Railways, Mr. Fitzgibbon, to make a survey of the line to Ipswich. Then he told the Brisbane people that he had taken the initiative for their line, that he had ordered a survey to be made. He (Mr. Fitz) had heard it said, and no doubt it was a fact, that to his Ipswich and West Moreton supporters, the honorable gentleman repre-

sented that he could not but move in the matter, yet that he had done so only so far as a survey was concerned—that he could not carry on, unless he made some arrangement in that way, to keep the people of Brisbane quiet. A survey was made by Mr. Fitzgibbon; the country bore the expenditure of about £2,000 for it; the plans and specifications were laid on the table; and there was the end of it. So matters stood for two or three years, until Mr., now Sir Robert, Mackenzie stepped in as the head of the Government; and he found himself in the same difficulty as his predecessor. He found that he could not carry on the Government, this abominable question again presenting itself. Mr. Mackenzie found that he, too, must do something for the Brisbane and Ipswich railway. He discovered that the survey made by Mr. Fitzgibbon was a very undesirable one, and that a fresh survey must be made; so he told his Ipswich and West Moreton supporters, and his Brisbane supporters, too, that it would be monstrous to make a line upon Mr. Fitzgibbon's survey. Accordingly another £1,200 was spent upon another survey, made by Mr. Thorneloe Smith; and so matters ended, again, for a time. Then, the question once more presented itself, and thenceforth caused a great deal of commotion in the country. No doubt every honorable member who knew the present Colonial Secretary would agree with him (Mr. Fitz) in one thing, that whatever Mr. Palmer said he would do, he would carry out. For himself, he believed that if the honorable gentleman gave his word with reference to any matter, the House might rest perfectly assured he would keep it, and that whatever he promised he would perform; and, if he said that he would not perform any work, they might rest assured, equally, that he would not perform it. Honorable members were, he (Mr. Fitz) thought, all perfectly aware that the honorable gentleman at the head of the Government had stated, in the most distinct and unmistakable terms, that he would never be the man to make the Brisbane railway. He had stated publicly and privately, and it was in print, that he would not make it as the head of the Government, and that he would not belong to any Government that should make it. The honorable the Postmaster-General was the mouth-piece of the Government in the Council; and if he would state distinctly, as it should have been stated in the other House, that the Premier, or the present Government, had altered the views which the head of the Government had formerly disclosed, all would be well—the House would no doubt be satisfied. The Premier should have admitted that he had made rash assertions, or that he had seen cause to alter his views, with reference to the Brisbane railway. The honorable gentleman had made a statement which he (Mr. Fitz) thought rash, and he ought now to say that he had found it necessary to alter his mind.

Honorable members were all perfectly aware that the greatest statesman of any age did not find it disgraceful to him to alter his mind on a political question; and why did not the Premier make some acknowledgment or explanation publicly? The Government were bound to state explicitly that they had changed their minds; and he (Mr. Fitz) hoped to hear the Postmaster-General make such a statement, in order to afford some grounds for confidence that the work would be carried out. With the permission of the House, he would read what the Premier had said:—

“He had been for years an opponent to the carrying out of railways through a sparsely peopled country. He had always considered that it was a mistake to do so, and he still held that opinion. He thought they could not have had a more unfortunate illustration than the one put forward by the member for the Valley when he referred to the railway from Newcastle-on-Tyne to Shields, as it was population made the railway there. But here, on the opposite side of the globe, it was argued that railways would make population. He did not see that the railways to Dalby or Warwick had had much effect in increasing the population of the country through which they passed; and he did not believe that a railway between Brisbane and Ipswich would have much effect in that way either. He had no doubt but the railway would be made. It was, as he had repeatedly stated, only a question of time. No doubt there would be such an amount of pressure brought to bear that it would have to be made, but he was not the man to make it. He would never belie his principles and opinions by doing so.”

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: Hear, hear.

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: Very well. What the Premier said, he would do. He was not the man to make a statement which he did not mean. No one would do him such an injustice as to accuse him of making a statement that he did not mean: he was too honest for anything of the kind:—

“With respect to the extension of the northern line, that was a different question, for there was a distinct promise made when the Warwick line was completed, that before any further railway works were carried out in the southern portion of the colony the northern line should be extended from Westwood. He had been frequently charged with changing his views with respect to the extension of the railway from Ipswich to Brisbane, but he could not see how it could have ever been supposed, from anything he had ever said, that he was in favor of the existence of the line, further than saying that the line would, no doubt, have to be made; but he had never uttered a word in support of it; on the contrary, he had repeatedly said that he would not support it, as it would run alongside a good road and navigable river.”

Now, those were the views of the Premier on the Brisbane railway question. The Council had ever performed their duty creditably with reference to that question; the other branch of the Legislature had not, he (Mr. Fitz) thought. They should not shirk their duty on the present occasion; but they should

bring the Government to book at once, and get from them a distinct statement whether they meant to perform the work. They were all perfectly aware, and so were most persons in Brisbane, that it was impracticable to make a line on the north side of the river, unless at an enormous extra expense. He had heard from engineers that it would cost double the money to make a line on that side that a line on the south side could be made for. Another thing which should not be lost sight of was, that the citizens of Brisbane had gone to enormous expense to make a bridge over the Brisbane; and that, in their financial calculations, they had considered the earnings of the bridge as a result of the railway coming to the south side of the river. Wherever the terminus was made, there must be a Government wharf, at which vessels could lie alongside to load or discharge cargo. On the north side of the river, it was known—or, rather, the House would know when the soundings which he had moved for should have taken place—that the water was very shallow; and that even Harris' wharf would have to be carried out very much farther than at present; while, on the other side, there was very deep water. No very serious delay would be caused, if the resolutions were not taken into consideration until this day fortnight; in the meantime, the House should get what evidence they could about the north side of the river, by examining engineers and other parties with reference to it. The best way to proceed would be to obtain the best evidence of the practicability, or otherwise, of carrying the line on the north side; then the Government should take some action. He (Mr. Fitz) did not do the Premier the injustice to say that he would ever make the line. Before the contract was signed, or before the line was begun, he would retire from the Government. Unless the Postmaster-General would say in the House, to-day, that the Premier had changed his mind, and was determined to carry out the railway without delay, there was no security that the work would be carried out. If he pledged himself, on the part of the Government, that it would be carried out, of course the House must take his pledge. He (Mr. Fitz) felt it his duty to make those remarks, and he left other honorable members to do as they liked.

The Hon. D. F. ROBERTS said he would simply remark, in reference to the various perversities—he would not call them falsities—of the Honorable Mr. Fitz, that so far from his having shewn that he had a great knowledge of bridge matters, it was never contemplated by the citizens that there would be great profit derived from the bridge because the railway terminus would be on the south side of the river.

The Hon. J. GIBBON said he thought it was highly desirable that the House should have some distinct assurance on the part of the Government that no time would be lost in carrying out the railway. Already there had

been three or four surveys of the line, which had issued in nothing—they merely had the effect of shelving the prosecution of the railway for some time. It would be useless to waste further time in making surveys unless a distinct assurance was given by the Government that the railway would be made. With reference to what the Honorable Mr. Fitz had said about the railway station, he, for one, thought that it should be on the bank of the river—the goods station.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: No, no.

The Hon. J. GIBBON: Well, at any rate, the Government project was to bring the railway down to some point on the Brisbane River—

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: No; the highest point of North Brisbane.

The Hon. J. GIBBON: As near as it could be got. Unless it was upon the bank of the river, somewhere below the bridge, it would be, to a great extent, useless. Considering the very great difficulties of making the railway on the north side, he thought it was almost useless to consider that question much; it would involve an additional bridge, for instance, which, of itself, would almost double the cost of the railway. Unless the House had an assurance on the part of the Government that they would carry out the railway immediately, they should pause before authorising the expenditure of any more money upon surveys.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: He had listened most attentively to what the Honorable Mr. Fitz and the Honorable Mr. Gibbon had stated; and he must say he was very much surprised, indeed, at the remark of the latter, that it was necessary to bring the railway close down to the water side. He denied that anything of the sort was necessary, or that there was the slightest occasion, in any possible way, for it—unless it was to advance the value of certain gentlemen's land that had wharf frontages, which was the only reason why, that he could see, for bringing the railway down to the river. Of course, he did not mean that the honorable gentleman had land there. He maintained that the railway should be brought to the highest part of Brisbane where it could be got to. It was quite easy to get drays to carry goods from the railway to the river, as drays were employed now to convey goods for shipment; and it would afford plenty of employment at the same time. It was a very nice little arrangement for the poor man; of whom both the honorable members who had spoken were friends. There was no reason for any better arrangement. As for the Honorable Mr. Fitz's statement, about the Government not being in earnest, he (Mr. Taylor) must say that he believed that they were thoroughly in earnest; and, from the fact that their late violent Opposition—there was little opposition, now, in the other House—had accepted willingly the resolutions, and that some of their greatest oppo-

nents believed that the proposed survey was a step in the right direction towards the completion of the Ipswich and Brisbane Railway, he did not see that the Council should object. As to the expense, he believed that he was as economical and as averse to spending money, as any man in the House. He believed the survey was the best thing, at the present time, to be done. Although a line on the north side of the river would cost a great deal more than a line on the south side of Brisbane, yet he should vote for it, because the north side was high and dry, and the line would be straight to Ipswich. The north line might cost from 33 to 50 per cent. extra for construction, but it would not cost a quarter of the money to keep it in repair afterwards that a line on the south side would require, because on the north side the line would be quite out of the way of floods. It would be wise economy to get a survey made at once, on the north side—a trial survey, to see what the line was like. Some gentlemen had stated that it was impossible to carry a railway on the north side. He (Mr. Taylor) should like to know on what grounds?

The Hon. J. GIBBON: At any moderate expense.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: He should like to know what was the expense? Was the honorable gentleman an engineer, that he could say? Or, was it mere hearsay or clap-trap, that had been put into his mind, to be uttered in the House? It must be left to the surveyors to say what the difference was. He (Mr. Taylor) was quite satisfied, from what he knew of both sides of the river, that the north side was the best for a railway to go straight to Ipswich. More than that—what would be the expense of land for a line on the south side?—land that was now worthless. What a nice little arrangement for the disposal of land that was now unsaleable! Who had town allotments, there, he (Mr. Taylor) should like to know? Let that be answered. The representative of the Government in the Council might have told the House a little more than he had told them about the subject. He seemed to be a very reticent leader. No doubt the great man who led the other House had told the Postmaster-General about those things; the honorable gentleman knew on which side of the river the survey was to be made. If he (Mr. Taylor) thought it was to be on the south side, he should vote against the resolutions. He thought it was the duty of the Premier, when he had a subject before Parliament, to inform his representative in the Council of the particulars, so that he could inform the House. The Postmaster-General should tell the House where the survey was to be made. He (Mr. Taylor) was willing that a survey should be made, again; but it should be one to bring the railway across the river high up, near the junction of the Bremer, and down along the north side of the Brisbane River, so that the line

should come into North Brisbane at some good spot, near the Grammar school, or thereabout. He was quite sure that the line would not be used, if it ended in South Brisbane, as much as it would if it came into North Brisbane. It was all very well to say that there was an understanding that it should come into South Brisbane, that there was water and wharfage there;—there were speculative allotments of land, there, with which, however, the House had nothing to do. He had heard a great deal about persons influencing where the station was to be; he had been talked to, and talked of, about such things; but he did not value the remarks made above a puff of smoke. He would challenge honorable members of the Council, or honorable members of the other House, who were so grand in making their attacks, to ask any surveyor or engineer whether any one was able to influence them in the carrying out of their work. One who was the most able man that ever came to the colony, as an engineer, had been black-guarded and scow-banked while in the colony, and after he had left it—Mr. Fitzgibbon; yet he (Mr. Taylor) defied the whole box and dice of those who had so spoken of that gentleman to bring proof of any of their charges against him, in any possible way. Because a man had a little foresight, and looked somewhat beyond his nose, he was talked about as having influenced this, that, and the other. Bah! Augh! It was disgusting to any man of common sense. Now, he should vote for the resolutions willingly. He should trust, knowing the business habits of the Secretary for Works, that the money would not be wasted. As he (Mr. Taylor) was on his legs, he would state that he never saw a Secretary for Works do his duty better than it was done at the present time by the honorable gentleman who now held that office, but who was unfortunately absent on a family matter. All over the colony, go where a man might, he would see proper works going on—real improvements. With the knowledge he (Mr. Taylor) had of the Colonial Secretary, and of the Secretary for Works—he was going no further than that Minister—he felt sure that the proposed expenditure would not be wasted; and he hoped that the House would pass the resolutions without a division. He hoped, likewise, that the honorable gentleman representing the Government in the Council was in a position to state where the survey was to go. If he was not in a position to inform the House—if the Premier would not trust him with that knowledge—he hoped that, notwithstanding, the House would not refuse the vote, because he looked upon the resolutions as the first step towards the Brisbane and Ipswich Railway. He was always an advocate for that railway. He could not vote for the resolution of the Honorable Mr. Fitz, last session, because it was a condemnation of the Government action; and he was sure that the Colonial Secretary would bring

forward resolutions at the proper time—and the honorable gentleman had done so. The Honorable Mr. Fitz was wrong in bringing forward a motion at an improper time. Now the proper time had come: gold, and tin, and copper, were being produced, the customs were increasing, the revenue was improving, the colonial debentures were selling at a high rate, and Queensland was in a position to go in for railways. He hoped that when the surveys were completed, there would be no delay in calling for tenders to carry out the railways; and he hoped that the Secretary for Works and the Premier would look to the contracts, and not allow the enormous profits to be made that had been made hitherto on the railway works. He was astonished that his honorable friend, Mr. Fitz, if he might be allowed to term him so, had found fault with the Premier for altering his views.

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: He did not say he found fault with him.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: Yes, yes. Statesmen greater than he, as the honorable gentleman had admitted, had altered their views, and were not worse thought of for it.

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: He did not find fault with him for changing. He had said that the Premier had not stated that he had changed; and he wanted an admission that the honorable gentleman's views were altered.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: He should like to know, if the honorable gentleman himself was at the bar of the House, would he tell the Council why he, the Honorable Mr. Fitz, had altered his views.

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: Never.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: If there was a man in creation who was conservative—one of the highest Tories in the land—that man was the honorable gentleman opposite; and, now, he came out as the greatest radical—if there was such a thing as a radical—and the poor man's friend! in every sense of the word! And the honorable gentleman said he had not altered his views!—he (Mr. Taylor) had no doubt, from conscientious motives. If he was allowed to alter his views, why should not that great man, the Premier of the colony, alter his views?

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: Yes; but he had not stated it.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: He did not change his shirt in a moment; he took it off piecemeal. He was going in for something else, now; he was going in for railways; and, as sure as Fate, before long—for the Colonial Secretary was a man in a strong position, with a strong will, and with a strong majority at his back, who followed him like lambs—they would be made. There was nothing more to say on the matter than that he thought the House would act wisely to pass the resolutions, although three surveys had been made before for the Brisbane and Ipswich line. One honorable member had been accused of desiring to bring the line down to

his own house; another had been accused of influencing the fixing of the terminus. He did not mind those accusations; but he should like those who made them to go to the surveyors and try to bring them to their way of thinking, or try to prove that they could be influenced. They might begin with the Government, if they liked, or in any other way, and go on from £5, to £50, and £100, and so on, trying to increase their influence; but it was not easy, as they would soon find out. Their money might be taken, but nothing would be done. It was a dangerous thing to expect. As far as that sort of thing was concerned, buying over an engineer or surveyor to take a line to a certain point, he did not believe there was anything in it, either for a radical party or a conservative; and although the House had heard about the doing of such things, yet he did not believe a word of it. He was asked, and often asked, to go out with a party, compass in hand, and, with a few sticks to hold out where he took his stand, to walk over land in a certain part of this colony: he did not know what was meant—he was too innocent! That was before the place of the station was appointed at a certain town in this colony. Well, he declined it. He did not want to make a figure of himself there. Let not his friends admit such a thing: it was all fudge, about dishonesty of that kind! He believed that the railway officers of the Government, and all who had acted under Mr. Fitzgibbon, were, with that gentleman himself, as good and as honest as any other men; and he was heartily sorry that Mr. Fitzgibbon was not here. He did not know what that gentleman's ideas of a line on the north side of the river were. He once rode down it.

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: Read the evidence.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: He did not care a fig about the evidence. All that evidence was interested. The witnesses could not be sworn; they had liberty to say what they thought best. He would sooner take the evidence of his honorable friend, Mr. Fitz, than half-a-dozen of them. He trusted that his honorable friend who represented the Government would not be put in a fix—as he had been by the honorable Mr. Fitz; and that he would be able to answer a question plainly and completely; and that he would get information when information was required by the House. He had nothing more to say.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: There was something more to be said, after what the honorable member opposite, Mr. Fitz, had stated. That honorable gentleman had asked him some fine questions, and he was prepared to answer them. It was as well that there should be some one to ask questions in the House. He thought honorable members had a right to ask whatever questions they wished; and he always endeavored to answer them. With regard to this matter, he could not tell the House which side of the river the railway would come; and he thought he might safely

say that even the honorable the Premier himself did not know. But this he (the Postmaster-General) did know, that trial lines were to be run on both sides, and the best side would be chosen.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR: Hear, hear.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: With regard to what several honorable members had said, that the surveys only caused money to be expended for nothing, except to put off the railway, he did wonder very much at them. Outside the House, they might read, in many places, that the programme of the Government was not to be gone into—that one Bill, and then another, was not to be brought forward—in fact, that it was all a sham. Now, they must have seen that the programme of the Government was really meant to be carried out; and that, before the Governor's Speech with which the session was opened was delivered in the Council Chamber, Ministers had fully made up their minds upon everything in that Speech, and to carry it out. He (the Postmaster-General) could fully answer that his honorable friend the Premier never had an idea of shelving, or failing to carry out, anything that was set forth in that Speech. He would say, now, that there was no doubt that the railway would be commenced as soon as it was practicable to commence it. Whatever might have been said to the contrary, the Government were not a Government to say they would do a thing, and then put it off. They had said they would make the railway, and they would carry it out. He expressed his sincere hope that would satisfy honorable members, especially the Honorable Mr. Fitz, for himself and the Ministry.

The Hon. H. B. FITZ: If he had said they would not, they would not!

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: If they said they would not, they would not; but they had said they would, and they would. His honorable friend was always very suspicious: it was a very bad trait in his character. They had sat together on the Royal Commission, and he (the Postmaster-General) perfectly agreed with what the Honorable Mr. Taylor had said, that the evidence, in many parts, was not worth very much; and if honorable gentlemen had heard the questions, the way in which the evidence was brought out, they would place very little value on it. He was against the Brisbane and Ipswich Railway, at the time, as was well known; but, for all that, he had repeatedly in the House said, that that line would sooner or later be made. It was not the time, then, to enter upon such an undertaking, for the colony was not in a position to spend money. Besides, a promise had been made that the Northern Railway should be first carried out. As the colony was in a very different position, now, and able to provide for the works, both the northern and the southern extensions were to be undertaken. The colony was never so prosperous as at present;

its prospects were, perhaps, never equal to what they were now; and this was the time to carry out the railways. He was very glad that such was the case. It had been said that he had not given such an explanation in opening the question as he should have done. It was best, perhaps, for the person who brought forward a question to say as little about it as he could; as in his reply he could answer anything that was urged against it in debate. He was not given much to speaking; and he should never use two words where one would be sufficient; and he thought it was far the best plan not to say too much. He had shortly answered the questions that had been put, and he thought the House were perfectly satisfied with what he had said.

Question put and passed.

APPROPRIATION BILL.

The Standing Orders having been suspended to allow of the Appropriation Bill being passed though all its remaining stages in the same day, the House went into committee on the Bill, which was reported without amendments, adopted, read the third time, and passed.

A message was ordered to be transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, returning the Bill.