

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

THURSDAY, 26 MARCH 1874

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Thursday, 26 March, 1874.

The Governor's Answer to the Address.—Marriage of the Duke of Edinburgh. — Completion of Parliament House.—Ministerial Statement.

THE GOVERNOR'S ANSWER TO THE ADDRESS.

The PRESIDENT reported that, in pursuance of the order of the House, at the previous meeting, he, with the mover and the seconder and other honorable members, had proceeded to Government House and presented to His Excellency the Governor the Address in Reply to the Opening Speech which was agreed to by the Council, yesterday ; and that His Excellency had been pleased to make the following Answer to the Address :—

“MR. PRESIDENT AND HONORABLE GENTLEMEN—

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

“NORMANBY.

“Government House,

“Brisbane, 26th March, 1874.”

MARRIAGE OF THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL moved—

That this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, to consider an Address to Her Majesty the Queen, expressing the loyal satisfaction with which this House has heard of the Marriage of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh.

Question put and passed ; and the House went into committee accordingly.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL, in rising to move the adoption of the Address, stated that

he looked upon the Royal marriage as of great political significance; in fact, he might say, it was the best marriage in the Royal Family of England that had taken place for some time; and he hoped and trusted it would be the means of strengthening the good understanding that existed now, and that had existed for a long period, between the two greatest powers in the world. He believed he was correct in saying that from time immemorial almost, with the exception of the period of the Crimean war, England and Russia had been firm allies. All hoped that they might remain so. The marriage would be the means of cementing the national friendship closer than it had been before. He read the draft of the Address which he had made, and which he hoped would meet with the approval of the House:—

“MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN—

“MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY—

“We, your Majesty’s loyal and dutiful subjects, the Members of the Legislative Council of Queensland, in Parliament assembled, desire humbly to convey to Your Majesty a renewed expression of our affection and loyalty towards Your Majesty’s Person and Government; and to assure Your Majesty of the deep satisfaction with which we have received the intelligence of the Marriage of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh with Her Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna, of Russia; and also to offer our heartfelt congratulations and good wishes for the happiness and prosperity of His Royal Highness, with whom we have had the honor and gratification of a personal acquaintance, and who is endeared to us by the memory of the unvaried courtesy and condescension he manifested towards us during his short stay in Queensland. And we also humbly beg leave to present our felicitations to Her Royal Highness the Princess who now shares his name, and hope for her as long a life of happiness and affection as this world can bestow.”

Of course, he should move the Council to invite the Legislative Assembly to a Conference on the Address, so that it should be transmitted to Her Majesty the Queen as the joint Address of the two Houses of Parliament.

The PRESIDENT suggested that certain alterations were necessary in the draft as read, in order that the Address should be in accordance with the resolution passed by the House, and to separate matters which were rather confusedly tied together into distinct paragraphs. On his motion,

The sentences of the Address were considered *seriatim*.

All the amendments proposed by the PRESIDENT were affirmed; and, on the resumption of the House, the Address, as agreed to, was reported as follows:—

“MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN—

“MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY—

“We, Your Majesty’s loyal and dutiful subjects, the Members of the Legislative Council

and Legislative Assembly of Queensland, in Parliament assembled, desire humbly to convey to Your Majesty a renewed expression of our affection and loyalty towards Your Majesty’s Person and Government, and to assure Your Majesty of the deep and loyal satisfaction with which we have received the intelligence of the Marriage of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh with Her Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna, of Russia.

“We desire also to offer our heartfelt congratulations on this auspicious event, and to add our earnest good wishes for the happiness and prosperity of His Royal Highness, with whom we have had the honor and gratification of a personal acquaintance—an acquaintance endeared to us by the memory of the unvaried courtesy and condescension he manifested to all classes during his short stay in Queensland.

“We at the same time humbly beg leave to present our felicitations to Her Imperial and Royal Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh, and to express a hope she may enjoy as long a life of happiness and affection as this world can bestow.”

The Address was then adopted by the House.

On the motion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, the following resolution was agreed to:—

That a Conference should be held between the two Branches of the Legislature, in order to give effect to the Address as agreed to by the House this day.

And, in pursuance thereof, a Message was ordered to be transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, as under:—

“MR. SPEAKER—

“The Legislative Council having agreed to an Address of Congratulation to Her Majesty, on the Marriage of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, request a Conference with the Legislative Assembly, in order to come to a mutual agreement on this Address, and intimate that they have appointed the Honorable T. L. Murray Prior, the Honorable H. B. Fitz, the Honorable E. I. C. Browne, and the Honorable G. Thern, to be Managers of the said Conference, and that such Conference be held in No. 1 Committee Room of the Legislative Council, at four o’clock, on Wednesday next.

“M. C. O’CONNELL,
“President.

“Legislative Council Chamber,
“Brisbane, 26th March, 1874.”

COMPLETION OF PARLIAMENT HOUSE.

The PRESIDENT said: Honorable Gentlemen—The next motion on the Paper is one standing in my name; and I will not detain the House for any length of time, I hope, in bringing the matter which I am desirous to bring under your consideration. The motion I ask you to agree to is to the following effect:—

1. That the Legislative Assembly be invited to join this House in the constitution of a Select Committee to examine the plans now existing for the completion of Parliament House, and to report the result of such examination, and any recommendation they may arrive at. Also, to

examine into and report on the tenure under which the land supposed to be dedicated to the uses of Parliament is now held.

2. That the members to serve on such Joint Committee be ten, five to form a quorum.

3. That the following members of this House be appointed to serve on said committee, viz. :—The Honorable G. Thorn, the Honorable H. B. Fitz, the Honorable D. F. Roberts, the Honorable James Gibbon, and the Mover.

4. That these resolutions be transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, by Message in the usual way.

I need not tell many honorable gentlemen who are here present that it is now nearly six years since we entered upon the occupation of this building; that is to say, it was in August, 1868, that I had the honor—holding, at that time, the office of Acting Governor of this colony—to open the Parliament for the first time in this building. From that time to this the building has continued to be an unfinished one. It is incomplete, according to the design intended originally by the architect whose plans were followed by the Government of the day at the time it was commenced, and it remains unfinished at the present moment. This appears to argue, on the part of the Parliament, a want of appreciation and of propriety of opinion, or else a want of means in the country itself to complete the undertaking which it commenced. We can no longer plead the want of means, which, I believe, up to the present time, has been the great cause of the non-completion, or of the delay in the completion, of this building. It has been unsatisfactory to all members of this House, and, I have no doubt, to the members of the other branch of the Legislature also, to look at the unfinished state of the front of the building. Very little now remains to be done to complete it—to put it in proper order. What requires to be done, I am not prepared to say; but I have learnt this much by the lapse of time, that, large as this building was supposed to be when first undertaken, it does not at the present time meet all the requirements of the Parliament of this colony. The late enlargement of the other House, and the additions made to this, require, as far as the refreshment rooms are concerned, considerably larger space and accommodation than is now afforded; and it is evident that if we undertake to provide for the present wants, we must also cast our thoughts forward and provide for the future; because there is no doubt that, although there has been an increase lately, many years will not elapse before another increase will be required and obtained. Therefore, it is a matter for some consideration what the requirements of the building will be; and it is desirable that the design shall be completed according to the original plans. I suppose that most honorable members will agree that it is unseemly and unsightly to leave an unfinished front to this building; and that it is no longer neces-

sary to do so for the want of means on the part of the colony. Therefore, I propose a Joint Committee of both Houses, which, by the way, was accepted by Parliament, last session. A resolution for such a committee was passed by the Council and sent down to the other House and agreed to there, but at too late a period for further proceedings. I brought forward the motion for the committee, but after its appointment only one meeting was held, and Parliament was prorogued. I now bring forward this present motion early in the session with the hope that we may, before the session closes, see the resolution acted upon and the needful works undertaken.

The question was put and affirmed *nem. diss.*

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: Honorable Gentlemen—I promised, yesterday, that I would state, to-day—and I will, as shortly as possible—some of the measures which the Government to which I have the honor to belong propose to bring in. I stated that, in fact, it was unprecedented for a Minister in the Legislative Council to make a Ministerial statement of policy; and such is the case, not only in this colony, but in the other colonies—a Ministerial Statement is not made in the Upper House. But, I maintain, that it should be made, simultaneously, in the Council and the Assembly.

HONORABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: Of course, I speak for myself, not for the members of the Ministry. The Council should assert its rights; and it is due to its position that this should be done. Yesterday I gave the substance of a few of the principal measures proposed by the Premier in the other House. I stated that the honorable gentleman at the head of the Government proposed to throw open for selection the pastoral lands in the settled districts of the colony which are held under the ten years leases. I stated, also, that the Secretary for Public Lands proposes to open those lands by means of a Bill, to be brought before Parliament. It is known to every honorable member who has studied the Land Act, that those leases can be annulled at any time by resolution of both Houses: I think it is the tenth clause of the Act which provides that the leases can be resumed at any time, in that way. The Government do not intend to resume the lands in that way; but we propose to bring in a Bill providing that the lands be thrown open to selection, so that the pastoral lessee may keep possession of the land until it is required for settlement. In some parts of the colony, the land will not be taken up for many years; in other parts, it will be taken up for settlement and agriculture very soon. The Government propose, also, to put in force the 116th clause of the Land Act of 1868. I presume honorable members

who have studied the land laws know that it is the clause making it imperative on selectors to perform their conditions faithfully. With that view, the Government have appointed bailiffs to carry out the provisions of the Act. They have had under consideration, also, the exchanges of land on the Darling Downs; and, I believe, they have had counsels' opinions on the matter, and counsel have decided that the whole transaction is illegal—the exchanges are shown to be bad in law, and consequently will have to fall through. I do not know whether I am saying more than what the Premier said with regard to these matters. So far as regards the land, that is what the Government propose. The Government intend, also, to bring in a Gold Fields Bill, to repeal the Act 20 Victoria, No. 29, and the regulations under it. They propose to create a Mining Department—I presume, with a responsible Minister at the head of it. Honorable members are aware that the gold fields of our colony have become of very great importance.

The Hon. G. HARRIS: Hear, hear.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: If the gold mines of this colony go on extending as they have extended to this time, gold mining will become the leading interest of Queensland. The development of this interest is very rapid and extensive; and this being the case, the Government think it necessary to bring in a Bill to do away with the existing Act and the regulations under it; to abolish the local courts, and to substitute a Mining Department, as I have already mentioned. I do not think any one will be aggrieved at Ministers adopting this course with regard to the important interest of mining. The Government, also, propose to deal with the Parliamentary Elections Act. The Bill which is to be brought in by the Premier will be the most statesmanlike measure ever introduced into the Australian colonies, or into the old countries of the world; it is one of the most perfect measures I ever read. It is not, however, for me to go into particulars on the present occasion, or to give the details of the measure; but I may say, with regard to the measure passed last session, that it is possible for the court to leave off every elector in a district that ought to be on the roll. I think this is quite sufficient to warrant the Government in undertaking to deal with this very important matter. I might expatiate very largely on the measure that will be brought in, but it will not affect this branch of the Legislature until the Council is elective—should that time ever arrive. The Government propose, also, to bring in an Audit Act. Honorable members are aware that, last year, the Government appointed a commission to inquire into the public accounts. I may state, for the information of honorable gentlemen, that the Bill to be brought in by my colleagues is founded upon the report of that commission; and I have very little hesitation in saying

that it will be a very good measure. It will do away with the red-tapeism that is practised in many departments—as, the Land Department, for instance, whose accounts are kept in three separate departments—the Land Office, the Treasury, and the Audit Office. It will provide that the Auditor-General shall audit the public accounts after payment, and not before, as now; that the Treasury shall make out all accounts, and that they shall be examined by the Auditor-General for the Parliament. I do not think honorable members will offer any great resistance to that measure. Another measure, which is for the Attorney-General to bring in, is for the appointment of a third judge. Honorable members know very well that, for some time past, owing to the indisposition of one of the judges of the Supreme Court—though not altogether to that—there has been a very great deal of annoyance to suitors by the delay in the disposing of the business before the court. The Government propose to remedy this grievous cause of complaint, and they contemplate the increasing of the staff of the Supreme Court by the appointment of a third judge. It is not for me to state the particulars of that measure; but if the Bill have leave to come here I will give them in detail. The Government propose also to compensate members of the Assembly.

The Hon. G. HARRIS: Not the Council?

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: I believe not. I did think, at one time, it should be done; but I am afraid that honorable members of this House will not be compensated for their services until they are elected. I read, the other day, a report drawn up by Sir William Manning, on a commission on this subject in New South Wales; and I may say, for myself, as a person who has closely watched Parliamentary proceedings, not only in the colonies, but all over the world, that I am rather much inclined to favor the elective system; and I believe in that report. I mentioned this to the late Postmaster-General, that one recommendation is that there should be cumulative votes for members of the Upper House, similar to the mode of voting adopted for the election of the school boards in England, under Mr. Gladstone's Act, passed in 1868. I may state that I am now speaking for myself: this has nothing to do with the Ministry. I approve of the electoral principle, and I am under the impression that a measure of that nature will be passed in New South Wales, where it is seen that to be an effective check upon the lower branch of the Legislature, the Council should be elective. I do not know whether it is necessary for me to speak more at length. I said yesterday that the Government propose to extend the telegraph wires and to extend railways; also, that, in the main, the Government have a progressive policy. I beg to move the adjournment of the House.

The Hon. T. L. MURRAY-PRIOR said, he thought it would be time enough for honor-

able members to make objections to what the Postmaster-General had stated on behalf of the Government, when the various matters were brought before the House. He could not say that he agreed with the honorable gentleman in thinking that the Council should be elective; but, of course, they would have to decide that themselves when the time came.

THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL: That is not a Government measure; I am only speaking for myself.

THE HON. T. L. MURRAY-PRIOR: With regard to extending the wires and the railways, the Government promised a great deal; but there was one thing he would caution them about—not to extend the wires where they could not be used; because, he contended, there was a great deal of difficulty in getting contractors to do the work, and also in getting telegraph operators. This was a great consideration, as he well knew, having had some experience on the subject. The lowering of the rates had been followed by such an increase of business in the Telegraphic Department that the staff had to work night and day; and additional operators could not be obtained. Without efficient operators, telegrams could not be transmitted with fidelity and accuracy; and, unless telegrams were correct, they were worse than useless. He was afraid that we had been going too fast in this matter. The same with regard to railways. He had no doubt there would be great difficulty found in getting men to construct the railways. He hoped the Government would take all the bearings of the subject into consideration, especially as to telegraph extension. Of course, when the proper time came, if he had any objections to make, he should make them; on the other hand, if the policy of the Government was good, he should be most happy to give his support to it.

Question put and passed.