

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 22 JUNE 1875

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Tuesday, 22 June, 1875.

Supply.

SUPPLY.

Upon the Order of the Day being read for the resumption of the Committee of Supply, The COLONIAL TREASURER moved—

That the Speaker do now leave the chair, and the House resolve itself into a Committee of Supply.

Mr. IVORY said, before allowing the House to go into Committee of Supply, he thought there were some subjects they ought to take a little notice of. They were told, in the Speech by the Governor at the commencement of the session, that one of the most important matters which the Assembly would be asked to deal with was that connected with the Crown lands of the colony. Now, as far as that question was concerned, they found that very little had been done. Beyond a few resumptions, which might have been made, and would have been made whatever Government was in power—there being no question as to the necessity for them—there had been no land legislation whatever. They were led to suppose—at least most people were led to suppose—that there would have been some comprehensive scheme of land legislation introduced; that at all events something would be done to set at rest the agitation which was abroad in the colony, and from which there was not the slightest doubt the colony was suffering severely, both in the estimation of capitalists residing in it, and in the estimation of capitalists residing beyond it. But they had had nothing of the kind; and what he rose more particularly to draw the notice of the House to was this:—He had tried to the best of his ability to gain information with regard to the working of these land laws—with regard to the administration of them during the tenure of office of the present Ministry. He had called for various returns bearing on the subject, and it was only to-day one very comprehensive return had been laid upon the table, which would involve a very considerable amount of trouble in inquiring into it. There were several other questions which had been shelved to a certain extent; returns he had asked for which, had the Government been at all anxious to give information to the House and the country upon, would not have laid them on the table in the way they had been. Evidently, at least to his mind, they were not in the slightest degree desirous of giving any information to the country. There was one question with regard to the setting at rest of titles under the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1868, and another with reference to the Selectors Relief Bill, which was intended to apply to selectors under the Act of 1866; but beyond passing the first reading,

he failed to see that they intended to proceed another step with them. He did not think, under these circumstances, they ought to go on with Supply until something more was done with regard to this matter, which, according to the Governor's Speech, was one of the most important questions before the country. He had not the slightest hesitation in accusing the Government of striving to burke inquiry. There were the opinions of the Attorney-General which he called for, and which the present Attorney-General promised on one occasion to produce, but he had not yet received them. The Minister at the head of the Government informed them, on one occasion, that it was owing to the absence of the honorable the Attorney-General that a certain opinion had not been laid upon the table; and although the Attorney-General came in a few minutes afterwards, and although it might have been laid on the table, they were yet without it. Now, he considered it was pure folly, and tampering with the House, that they should be humbugged in that manner. They were desirous of obtaining information on these all-important questions, which the Government themselves admitted were all-important questions; and what had been done respecting them? They had done simply nothing, and he believed they had not the remotest intention of doing anything. He had said before in the House, and he now said again, that the Government simply used this land agitation as a sweet morsel to roll under their tongues; that they simply kept up this agitation throughout the country to keep themselves in their present position; for, were the land legislation of the country established upon a sound and permanent basis, they would not hold their seats for another week. He certainly thought, before they allowed the present Government to go into Supply, they ought to have some information with regard to their course of conduct in connection with the question of land legislation.

Mr. DE SATGE said he thought it very extraordinary that no member of the Ministry had given any answer to the very reasonable demands of the honorable member for Burnett; it would have been simply an act of courtesy to have done so. He differed, however, from that honorable member when he said it was to be regretted that they had not land legislation before they went into Supply. He thought it was the greatest possible mercy that the Government at present in power had not gone into any comprehensive scheme of land legislation. He distrusted them entirely, so far as that question was concerned. They had shown that they wished to stick to their places, and they had also shown the greatest consideration in not going into the land question at all. He believed theirs were most unsafe hands to deal with any question of the kind; and he, for one, felt very great relief that they had not attempted anything of the sort. The only Bill bearing on the subject

had been industriously kept in the back-ground; and he, for one, was quite satisfied to go on with the Order of the Day.

Mr. MOREHEAD said he really thought, before they went into Committee of Supply, they should have some information from honorable gentlemen opposite, who represented the Government, as to whether they were to get these returns at all, or when they were to be furnished. He believed, while speaking on this motion, he was perfectly right in referring to other matters besides the question raised by the honorable member for Burnett. He found, on looking through "Hansard," which purported to give a report of the debates that took place in that House, that on more than one occasion there had been suppressions of what actually took place. He found that the most imperious statement made by the honorable the Attorney-General, on the second reading of the Sheriff's Bill, had been suppressed. It would be in the recollection of honorable members, that on the occasion referred to, that honorable gentleman applied the word "falsehood" to the honorable member for Maranoa, and, when he was sharply taken up, he made, what he (Mr. Morehead) thought, a very shuffling sort of explanation or withdrawal of the expression. The word was made use of—

The SPEAKER: I think the honorable member is out of order in referring to a previous debate.

Mr. MOREHEAD: He bowed to the decision of the honorable the Speaker, and he would simply say, he hoped his statement, that the word "falsehood" was used by the honorable the Attorney-General, would be reported; and he trusted there would be no more most improper suppressions in "Hansard" of debates, as they actually occurred in that House, for, otherwise, they could not be historical records.

Mr. PALMER: Were the Ministry dumb, or did they refuse to answer the question of the honorable member for the Burnett? It seemed to him very much like treating the honorable member with contempt. He had asked a very civil question, which he was quite justified in doing before going into Committee of Supply, as to when certain returns he had moved for were likely to be furnished, and surely, some member of the Government could tell him whether there was a probability of the returns being furnished or not. He did not wish to stand there to lecture the Government, but he thought Supply would get on much better and more speedily if honorable members on both sides were treated with more courtesy, and civil answers were given to civil questions. They would not facilitate business by sitting there in solitary dumb grandeur; not a bit in the world.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS said he did not understand the honorable member for the Burnett to ask when any return

would be furnished. He knew he spoke about the long time that had elapsed since the return that had been laid on the table was asked for; and that the returns had not been furnished was, he (the Secretary for Public Lands) thought, a good reason why they should not at present go on with the Land Bill. The other returns that honorable member had asked for, would, he believed, be laid on the table to-morrow; and if he persisted in asking for voluminous returns, he could hardly expect to get them in a short time. The return that had been laid on the table had taken a long time to prepare.

Mr. McILWRAITH said he could scarcely understand to which return the honorable the Minister for Lands referred, because there were two or three returns the Ministry had not laid on the table. There was one the honorable member for the Burnett had not referred to, and he would like to have some information on the matter. It was a return moved for by the honorable member for the Burnett, and the motion was carried with certain amendments made by members of the Government. On referring to page 73 of the Votes and Proceedings, he found it was:—

"A return showing,—(1.) All moneys, other than salaries, which have been paid out of the Public Revenue since the 1st day of January, 1874, to members of Parliament, or to firms of which any member of Parliament was, at the time of making any such payment, a known partner, specifying each payment, the date of such, and for what consideration said payment was made. (2.) A like return of unsatisfied claims made by members of Parliament upon the Government, for sums of money, specifying whether the applicants have made said claims on their own behalf or as agents for others."

That, with the amendments moved by the Government, was carried, and he considered it a most important return, and one that they should have before them, because it would very considerably affect the progress of Supply in committee. The honorable member for the Burnett had not referred to it, but he would like to know when it was likely to be laid on the table. But there was a much more important return, with regard to which the Government might, at all events, have said what they were going to do. It was a motion on that day's paper for—

"A return of all selections of land taken up under the Act of 1868, whether conditional or otherwise, which, by reason of non-fulfilment of conditions, have or may become forfeited. Also, for a copy of the reports of the various commissioners, bearing upon this subject of non-fulfilment of conditions; and of any other evidence in the possession of the Government, by which such forfeiture or liability to forfeiture has been or may be proved."

Now, that was a motion which, he thought, ought to have gone as formal, and, at all

events, as it had not, some reason ought to have been given why it was not taken as formal. That, he believed, was information they ought to have before they went into land legislation, and the Government persisted in saying they intended to go on with land legislation. He had listened attentively to the honorable the Minister for Lands, but the honorable gentleman looked down on the ground, and no one on that side of the House could understand what he said; and he thought they ought to have the return, or a good reason should be given why it was not produced. The Government ought, with a view to the progress of business, give every information they could, because there was no place where they could be so baulked in getting on with business as in Committee of Supply. The House desired to have this information, and if there were any reason why it should not be given, he was quite prepared to hear it; but he was sure every honorable member would agree with him that information should not be withheld on so important a matter, especially as the Government said they intended to legislate upon it.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL said, as his honorable colleagues, the Treasurer and the Secretary for Lands, had spoken, he would give the information desired by the honorable member for Maranoa as far as he could. The honorable member had referred to a return of all moneys paid to members of Parliament, and he (the Attorney-General) was informed by the honorable the Colonial Treasurer that it was being prepared, and extra clerical assistance had been obtained for that purpose, but the records were so numerous that it was not yet ready; it was being pushed on with all possible speed. With regard to the other matters the honorable member for Maranoa referred to, they were both returns of which notice of motion had been given, but they had not yet been ordered by the House; and the honorable member must see that the time for the Government to give reasons for these motions not being allowed to go as formal was when they were called on.

Mr. MCILWRAITH: It has been called on.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The notice of motion he referred to was on the paper for to-day, and had not yet been called on. There was another one which was called on on Thursday last, and which now stood on the paper for Thursday next. With regard to the one standing on the paper for to-day, he would point out, that any honorable member looking at it would see it was for a return of all the selections in the colony, because any selection in the colony was liable to be forfeited for non-fulfilment of conditions. The only part that could be furnished without producing a complete return of the records of the Land Office, would be the latter part relating to the reports of commissioners. That, of course, could be produced, and it had been asked for by the honorable member in another return. The first part was quite

impracticable, and the second had been already ordered. He did not know whether these were the reasons which the honorable the Minister for Lands would give, but they were what struck his mind. With respect to the other return, the honorable member said he did not hear the remarks of the honorable the Minister for Lands, on Thursday, in giving his reasons for not consenting to the motion as formal; and he might say he understood the honorable gentleman rose to give those reasons, but he did not do so because, as he (the Attorney-General) understood, there had been an arrangement come to to adjourn, and as the explanation would have taken longer than the time available before six o'clock, he therefore moved the adjournment of the debate, which was agreed to without discussion. He did not know what reason might be given on Thursday, but he thought any honorable member looking at the return would see why it could not be consented to in its present form.

Mr. MCILWRAITH said, as a matter of explanation, the honorable the Attorney-General had answered what he never referred to at all. He never referred to the notice on the paper for the 24th instant.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL said the honorable member referred to the speech of the honorable the Minister for Lands on Thursday last, and the motion then under discussion now stood on the paper for Thursday next.

Mr. PALMER said, perhaps, as the honorable the Attorney-General was in the humor for explaining, he would state what the honorable the Minister for Lands said to-night. No one on that side of the House heard it.

The question was then put and passed, and the House went into committee accordingly.