

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates  
[Hansard]

**Legislative Assembly**

**WEDNESDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER 1875**

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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

*Wednesday, 1 September, 1875.*

Supply.

## SUPPLY.

The COLONIAL TREASURER moved—

That the Speaker leave the chair, and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, further to consider the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Mr. DOUGLAS rose for the purpose of drawing the attention of the honorable member at the head of the Government to the resolution standing in his name for the consideration in committee of a Bill to provide for the settlement and occupation of unalienated Crown lands in the Wide Bay and Burnett districts, and the formation therein of roads, tramways, and railways, and of asking the honorable member to name a day when he would afford him an opportunity of bringing forward that matter. If the honorable member would mention a day, he would promise not to occupy the House for more than a short time.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said there was a large quantity of business on the paper, and, therefore, it was perfectly impossible for him to name a day. He should be very happy to assist the honorable member in any way as far as he could but the honorable member

must remember that there were other motions which honorable members were equally anxious to have discussed. He did not think anything would be gained by making an arrangement at the present time.

Mr. DOUGLAS would point out to the honorable gentleman that he had only asked what he considered he was perfectly justified in doing, and that if he could not get any satisfactory reply from the Government, it would be optional for him to offer—he would not say obstruction—but an objection to going into Committee of Supply—

The SPEAKER: The honorable member has already spoken.

Mr. PALMER moved—

That this House do now adjourn,

and he did so for another purpose than that which had just been brought forward by the honorable member for Maryborough. He had had a return just put into his hands of payments made to honorable members of that House, which was more calculated to mislead than to give the information which the honorable mover for the returns sought to obtain. He found, on looking at the return, that the Honorable A. H. Palmer was put down for £251 3s. 10d. on account of the *Courier*, and that Mr. Robert Ramsay had a sum credited to him on the same account, and if he went on further he saw the names of other honorable members in connection with the same account. Now that was a farce, for he had never received one penny from the Government on *Courier* account.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: That is in connection with the Brisbane Newspaper Company.

Mr. PALMER: He was not a newspaper proprietor. Then he was put down as having received another sum of £112 10s. That would lead the public to believe he had received that money as a member of Parliament, but the fact was that it was for refundment of rent for country which never existed. He would ask, whether that was the sort of return to go before the country? there should be some explanation of those items—

The COLONIAL TREASURER: There is, further on.

Mr. PALMER: He saw also that the honorable member, Mr. Bell, had a sum put down to him; and that Mr. John Douglas had received £152 16s.

Mr. AMHURST: Another tip.

Mr. PALMER: The honorable member, Mr. Fraser, had come off rather badly, as he had only received £2 18s.; whilst Mr. Fryar had been whipped in for £36 16s. 11d. Mr. Griffith had been going in for £684 1s., but they all knew that that honorable member had received a good deal more than that. Then there were the names of Mr. Harris, Mr. Henmant, Dr. Hobbs, and a host of others, for various sums. Why had it not been shown for what all those sums had been paid? He could not see any explanation. As

he had said before, he had never received any money from the Treasury except his own money back.

The COLONIAL TREASURER said the honorable member must bear in mind, when he challenged the correctness of the return, that it was prepared in accordance with an order of that House, which was to the following effect:—

“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.”

He believed that all the items challenged by the honorable member in reference to the *Courier* were correct.

Mr. PALMER: I am certain they are not.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: The only means of ascertaining who had been partners in the Brisbane Newspaper Company (the *Courier*) was from the records of the Supreme Court, which showed the shares held by each partner. The original return had charged Mr. Stephens with the whole amount, that gentleman having been put down as having been paid something like £3,000, and that would have been calculated to mislead, as Mr. Stephens only held one half-share, whilst Mr. Ramsay, the honorable the Speaker, and the honorable member for Port Curtis held shares. At the suggestion of the Auditor-General, reference had been made to the books of the Supreme Court, and a clerk was sent to examine them, and it being then found that Mr. T. B. Stephens only held one half-share, the amount was proportionately divided amongst the several shareholders.

Mr. BELL took it that the return before them was the one which the honorable Colonial Treasurer had been unable to furnish within the usual time in which returns were expected to be furnished.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: It is a return from the Auditor-General.

Mr. BELL: It was one of those returns intended to show what had not been shown. Would the honorable member say whether it had been prepared by the Auditor-General, or at the Treasury; he meant whether it was according to the system of the Auditor-General or of that of the Treasury?

The COLONIAL TREASURER: It was the compilation of the Auditor-General.

Mr. BELL: Well, then, he thought it did not do the Auditor-General the slightest amount of credit, unless it was that gentleman's intention, or the intention of the Government, to mystify the House and the country—that was to say, if the people took the trouble to read it. It did not supply the information required, and unless those who read it knew the circumstances under which the money was supplied they would be wholly misled. He thought it would have been pos-

sible for the honorable Colonial Treasurer to have obtained a better return out of his own department; and from his knowledge of that department, it would have taken only a short time to have prepared a return that would have been of some use to honorable members. He would take his own case: the money put down in the return as having been paid to him was only his own money refunded in connection with a land selection, and he would ask, whether that was supposed to be the intention of the return asked for?—it was not a payment to him as a member of Parliament, but was money refunded to him personally, a matter altogether outside of the object of the return. He was sorry for the honorable Colonial Treasurer, who must have been aware that such a return was about to be compiled, especially as it had taken such a long time to compile. He hoped some honorable member would ask how much the compilation had cost. At any rate, he thought it would be more satisfactory to the House if the honorable gentleman would get one of his clerks to compile another return.

Mr. J. SCOTT said that he had heard that the honorable the Treasurer and the Auditor-General had not been working in accord at all in that matter; he would not say that they were fighting, but they were not working in accord, and the result was the return before the House, which was a disgrace to any one. According to the terms of the order, he held that the amounts set down against the honorable member for Port Curtis, and Mr. Ramsay, ought to have been put down to the *Courier*, with a foot-note stating that such and such members were supposed to be part proprietors of that newspaper at that time. He considered that the return was a positive disgrace to every one connected with the compilation of it.

The COLONIAL TREASURER said, that the honorable member for Dalby had objected to an item being put down to him, because it was a refundment of his own money; but he might state, that the sum put down to him was precisely of the same nature, as it was a rebate of Customs duties paid by the firm of which he was a member. He would explain how the return had been made. Honorable members must be aware that up to the time of the present Audit Act coming into operation, the Audit Office was the only office where all the accounts of the colony had been kept together, and as the Auditor-General had prepared a somewhat similar return some six or seven years ago, he thought it was the most convenient place at which to prepare such a return. It having been arranged that it should be prepared at that office, he sent a memorandum to the Auditor-General, asking him to prepare it up to the 1st September, 1874, and, in reply, he was asked by that gentleman to name some person who had been recommended for employment. That, however, he refused to do, as he disclaimed all responsibility of the return. The return

as at first prepared had the total amount paid to the Brisbane Newspaper Company unintentionally put down to Mr. Stephens; but he considered that was so manifestly incorrect that he had it sent back for amendment. It was supposed that the names of all members who, either personally or as members of firms, had had transactions with the Government should be included in the return furnished, and he considered that if any of the transactions of his firm were to be made public property, it was equally right that the names of gentlemen who carried on the business of newspaper proprietors should be made public also; but the original return did not include those names, but only that of Mr. Stephens. That appeared to him to be so unsatisfactory that he sent to the Auditor-General, who agreed that it was not satisfactory, and at the same time pointed out the means by which the names of the proprietors could be obtained from the Supreme Court; and, as he had before stated, the amount was then divided proportionately. The honorable member for Port Curtis objected to any sum being placed against his name—

The SPEAKER: The honorable member is now going beyond an explanation.

Mr. THOMPSON said there was no doubt that the object of the order was, that there should be a return before that House of sums of money paid by various Governments to members of Parliament; but although he had not read the return furnished, all through, from what he had seen of it, it appeared to him to go outside of what was required altogether, or what was meant. Those business transactions that were put down could not be helped in a small colony, but what was required was, a return to show what any man had received outside of his salary, or if he had no salary, what he had received outside of his commission—but the return did not show that, in fact it was extremely meagre.

Mr. PALMER said it was very evident from the speech of the honorable Colonial Treasurer, that he had supplied the present return on purpose; for whilst the honorable member stated that the Auditor-General had sent down one return, which he had ordered him to have corrected, he had stated that he did not hold himself responsible for the return. Now, it was an imperfect return, for he denied that as a member of that House he had ever received one shilling of Government money; it was a return intended to mislead the public—to lead them to think that he and other honorable members had been receiving money from the country. It was never intended by the honorable member who moved for the return that members of a public company should be introduced into it. They had been mystified all through the session by the returns furnished by the Government, and certainly the one now before them was calculated to mystify them. What they wanted was, to know what travelling expenses Ministers had received.

THE COLONIAL TREASURER : They are there.

MR. PALMER : There were none down to him, and he had had travelling expenses to a small extent—they wanted to know how the money of the country was going, not what one firm or another had sold to the Government—he did not care whether a member of the Government had sold to it goods to the amount of £1,000 or £2,000, so long as the country received value for it. It was evident that the object had been to mix up all sorts of irrelevant matter in order to mystify the House, and the real object of the return they had not been able to get; he should like to know whether it was to be got at.

The question of adjournment was put and negatived.

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