

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 1876

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Thursday, 7 September, 1876.

Maryborough School of Arts Lands Sale Bill.—Jetty at Sandgate.—Gratuity to Mrs. Thomas Clark.—The Chinese Petition.—Western Railway Contract.

MARYBOROUGH SCHOOL OF ARTS LANDS SALE BILL.

Mr. BAILEY moved—

That this Bill be now read a second time.

Question put and passed.

JETTY AT SANDGATE.

Mr. FRYAR, pursuant to notice, moved—

That this House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, to consider of an Address to the Governor, praying that His Excellency will be pleased to cause to be placed upon the Supplementary Estimates the sum of £3,000 for the purpose of constructing a jetty at Sandgate.

He presumed it would not be necessary for him to go into a lengthened statement to show the necessity of the work he proposed. Sandgate was, he thought, a place pretty well known to the majority of honorable members, as also was the necessity of there being a jetty there where passengers and cargo could be disembarked. It was one of the oldest townships in the colony, for he found that land had been sold there by the Government nearly a quarter of a century ago, and in the years 1853 and 1854, a larger amount was received from the sale of land there than he now asked for the construction of a jetty; he might also mention that very little money had been expended upon the place by the Government. At the last sale in 1874, land realised £400 an acre; and although very little was now left unalienated, he believed that the Government would be amply recouped for any money expended by them. The land on the road to Sandgate had also brought very good prices—higher, in fact, than were obtained for any other country lands, as it realised several years ago as much as £5, £6, and £7 an acre. As so little had been done for the township, and as, in the original plans and surveys pre-

pared by the Government of New South Wales, it was evident that it was intended to have a jetty, he hoped that the House would not, at any rate, refuse the proposition to consider the motion in committee on some future day.

The COLONIAL TREASURER said he did not think the Government had any great objection to the motion for going into committee, and being there discussed on its full merits; at the same time, in making that statement, he did not mean to infer that the Government would give the proposition of the honorable member their support. He thought it was a great pity that the honorable member, when in the administration last year, had not brought the matter before the House, as then the position of the Treasury was more gratifying than it was at the present time, and honorable members might have been willing to view it in a more favorable spirit than they might be now. Before it went into committee, honorable members would, no doubt, avail themselves of an opportunity of ascertaining the requirement for the work. He would take that opportunity of again reminding honorable members of the very rapid manner in which they were bringing forward claims on the Treasury; and they seemed to think it was a favorable time for making applications on behalf of their constituents. They had had a narrow escape that evening of passing a sum which, together with the proposal now before the House, would be nearly £80,000; but as they had in other cases allowed a motion for going into committee to pass, the Government did not intend to offer any opposition in the present instance.

Question put and passed.

GRATUITY TO MRS. THOMAS CLARK.

Mr. W. SCOTT moved—

That this House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, to consider of an Address to the Governor, praying that His Excellency will be pleased to cause a sum of £300 to be placed on the Supplementary Estimates for 1876, as a gratuity to the widow of the late Thomas Clark, who died in the service of the Government, under whom he had been employed for many years.

And in doing so he said he should like to state that the late Thomas Clark was employed by the Government for a great number of years, and died whilst in their employment through injuries received when employed as a diver at the Thirteen-mile Rocks. He was shifted about from one place to another until he was appointed a pilot at Bundaberg or on one of the barren islands near it, where he was found dead. He thought under the circumstances it was only a matter of justice to the man's family that the gratuity now asked for should be given. As honorable members would, no doubt remember, a petition on the subject was addressed to the late Colonial Treasurer, Mr. Hemmant, who, not caring to take any

action in the matter himself, shifted the matter on to his (Mr. Scott's) shoulders. When, however, the motion was called on Mr. Hemmant objected to it as a formal motion, and afterwards voted against it. He thought he need not enter at length into the statements contained in the petition, but merely repeat that Clark died from the effect of injuries received whilst in the service of the Government.

The PREMIER said he did not think that the honorable member for Mulgrave had made out a case, or had assigned any reasons why the family of the late Thomas Clark should receive any compensation, as the man was not supposed to be injured whilst in the employment of the Government. If the present application was granted, there would be no reason why the widow of every man who had been employed by the Government should not come down for compensation. He could understand that in some cases the House had very properly given compensation to widows of persons who had been killed whilst actually in the service of the Government; but in the present instance he did not see that they should commit themselves to any amount. He was confident that if money was voted to Mrs. Clark, there would be any amount of claims made upon the Government; in fact, honorable members were only waiting to have an opportunity of coming down for sums of money under similar circumstances. He should like to hear something more about Thomas Clark, as he could find nothing in "Hansard" about the case; at the same time, he thought the House should not give one sixpence.

Mr. PALMER thought it was hardly necessary to oppose the motion at that stage, especially when it was remembered that the matter was absolutely shunted on to the shoulders of the honorable member for Mulgrave by the late Colonial Treasurer, and the honorable member considered he was bound to go on with it. He thought, under the circumstances, the Government might allow it to go into committee; at the same time he was not prepared to say that he should vote for the grant, for he thought applications of a similar kind were becoming too numerous.

The COLONIAL TREASURER said that during the previous session the honorable member brought forward the motion in a somewhat different form; and he should also now have stated under what circumstances the late Colonial Treasurer opposed it. So far as he recollected, it went into committee, and its further consideration was adjourned, and when called on subsequently, lapsed. He might again mention that the present case was a confirmation of what he had stated a few evenings ago, that the very fact of the House allowing motions like the present to pass before ascertaining the *bona fides* of the case, seemed to entitle such matters to their consideration, not only during the present, but also during some future session.

He thought, before asking the House to go into committee, the honorable member for Mulgrave should have stated his case a little more clearly, and should have advanced more reasons than he had done, why it should receive the favorable consideration of the House. He should not object to the motion at its present stage, but he thought they were establishing a dangerous precedent. He considered that men in the Government service should take the same precautions for providing for their families after their death that men outside the service took; and he did not think that the fact of a man being in the employment of the Government and meeting with an accident should be any argument for his representatives going to that House and asking for pecuniary assistance. There were relatives of a number of men who had served the Government much longer than Clark appeared to have done, and if the House granted the application of the honorable member, they must open the door to the favorable consideration of numerous other claims; again, by granting one and refusing others, the Ministry were placed in a very disagreeable position. He thought there was nothing in the present case to entitle the representatives of the man to consideration from the country; there was nothing to show that his death was caused by injuries received whilst he was in the employment of the Government. Had he been under the old Civil Service Act, his wife would only have been entitled to £150 instead of the £300 now asked for. He thought that the honorable member for Mulgrave would have done better if he had abided by his former terms. He did not suppose that the Government would object to the motion, but he could not see that anything had been shown, either in the past or present session, to warrant the honorable member in expecting that they would support the application.

Mr. J. SCOTT thought the honorable member for Mulgrave was entitled to some consideration in the matter, as it had been put into his hands by the late Treasurer.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: He voted against it.

Mr. J. SCOTT said that on that ground the honorable member was all the more entitled to consideration: having been so badly used by the late Treasurer, he ought to be better treated now. There could be no possible harm in allowing the motion to go into committee, and after the treatment the honorable member had received, he thought there should be no opposition made.

Question put and passed.

THE CHINESE PETITION.

Mr. THOMPSON said he had written authority from the honorable member for Cook to move the motion in his name for the printing of the translation of the petition from Chinese residents at Cooktown against the increased gold mining and business

license fees. He had referred to an authority on such matters, Mr. Todd, and found that it was competent for him to move the motion, as it had not been opposed, but had merely been objected to as not formal.

The SPEAKER said in regard to the authority to which the honorable member had referred, it applied only to unopposed motions.

Mr. MORGAN said that he had called out "not formal" when the question was put from the chair, but was quite willing to withdraw the objection and let the motion pass.

Mr. THOMPSON said that, under the circumstances, he would not press the motion.

WESTERN RAILWAY CONTRACT.

Mr. McILWRAITH said the motion he was about to move was one which he should have contented himself by simply moving without comment, had it not been for the remarks which had been made by the Premier at an earlier period of the evening, when the House was in committee on the motion for the construction of a bridge across the River Burdekin. The motion stood as follows :—

That there be laid upon the table of this House, a copy of the contract with the Messrs. Overend for the construction of Nos. 1 and 2 sections of the Western Railway.

They had had a great deal of information with regard to the construction of railways during the present session, and if there had been any one thing brought out more prominently than another, it was, that it was found that the colony had drifted into a large expenditure for public works, and that when they came to count the cost they found that no one was responsible for it. It was with a view to remedy that matter, and prevent a repetition of such a state of things in future, that he had asked for the information referred to in his motion. He did not know of any railway works concerning which less information had been given to that House than the contract for the line between Dalby and Roma. It was understood out of doors that the contractors had undertaken the construction of so many miles of railway at so much per mile, and that there was a guarantee that the work would be carried out for that sum; but he believed that Messrs. Overend's contract was merely on a schedule of prices. Under those circumstances, it would be competent for any Government Engineer or other official to say, a few years hence, that he had nothing to do whatever with saying what the work was going to cost; for his part, he believed that at the end of two or three years it would be found that the railway cost a great deal more than was estimated. The only thing to justify them in thinking that the line would cost £3,000 or £4,000 a-mile was a statement made by His Excellency the Governor, in an after-dinner speech at Dalby, a few months ago. Now, it was evident to him that there was not a contract with

Messrs. Overend to finish a certain number of miles of railway for a lump sum, but only a contract for a schedule of prices for brickwork, earthwork, timber, &c.; there was nothing to show what the real cost of the railway was to be. It had been indicated to him, from certain expressions which had been drawn from the Premier, that the objection to putting the House in possession of the information required was, that the contract must be considered a confidential document, and that it would be an injustice to the contractors to expose it.

The PREMIER: Hear, hear.

Mr. McILWRAITH said that that was evidently the cause of the objection, and it was certainly an objection he should not have expected, inasmuch as the House was bound to know what the railway was going to cost for construction. Lest the Government did not understand the practice in such matters, he could assure them that there was not a single railway contract let in New South Wales or Victoria where the prices were not immediately known; in fact, they were printed and could be bought by anybody at the Government Printing Office as soon as they were ready; of that he had a personal knowledge, so that the Government would not be committing any injustice by giving the information. He could quite understand the Government keeping the prices of any contracts in their possession until a contract was accepted, but that was an entirely different matter. What they wanted to get at by the motion was, the conditions under which Overend and Company had the railway contract at the present time. If the Government were willing to give the information in any other way than that proposed, he was willing to waive his motion, as he was quite anxious not to injure any individuals by asking for information that was private; but he did not consider such information was private, or that the contractors would be injured by its being made public. He wished the Government to understand what he wanted, which was, whether the work had been let for £3,000 or £4,000 a mile or what, so that the real state of the case might be placed on record; he believed, however, that in the course of two or three years the work would be found to have cost from £4,000 to £5,000 a mile. He thought he had explained sufficiently what he wanted, and that the object of his motion was not for the purpose of fishing for private information. If the Premier or any other member of the Government could suggest any other means by which he could get that information, he should be perfectly satisfied.

The PREMIER said he had no objection to give any information he had to the honorable member, but he would put it to the honorable member whether it would not be advisable to postpone doing so until the next two sections of the line were let, which would probably be in a week or two. He thought that to

some extent it would not be to the interest of Messrs. Overend and Company that their schedule of prices should be made known before then. Of course, if the honorable member was anxious to know the terms of the contract at once, he would furnish them, but he should not like them to be made public. The contract was taken on a schedule of prices, and not for a lump sum.

Mr. PALMER could not understand why any distinction should be made between railway contracts and any other contracts, such as for stationery, ironmongery, or anything else. In other cases the prices were published at once, and why that should not be done with railway contracts he was at a loss to understand; he considered it was the duty of the Government to make known the prices immediately. The Government were entitled to make the best terms they could, and he hoped the honorable member would press his motion. The House ought to have had the information within a week of their meeting, for the Government were not a close corporation of individuals acting on their own account. The House especially was bound to know what the Government were doing; they might possibly have given a great deal too much to Messrs. Overend, and a great deal had been said about that firm getting considerably over other tenders. He did not believe in mere gossip, but a letter was published in the *Brisbane Courier* from a man who said he had offered to make the railways for considerably less than Messrs. Overend. There was no reason whatever why any action of the Government should be kept secret, unless they were ashamed of it.

Motion put and passed.