

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 1876

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and New South Wales, showing that it was not the practice in those colonies to lay schedules of prices before those Parliaments. The honorable member for Maranoa therefore, in making a contrary statement on a previous occasion, was not correct. He (the Premier) objected at the time to the practice of laying such schedules before the House, and he was of the same opinion still; but if the House thought differently, he would of course comply with their request, although he did not think it was the proper course.

The SPEAKER: When an honorable member asks a question of this kind without notice, there ought not to be a speech made upon the subject.

Mr. PALMER said, rather than stop the discussion, he would move the adjournment of the House. Having done this, he would now inform the honorable the Premier that he did not go by the practice in Victoria and New South Wales, but preferred to follow the practice which had obtained in Queensland, and he could point to papers laid before the House, which papers were schedules of prices: he referred to the case of Mr. Ransome in contracting for the line from Stanthorpe to the Border, and gave it as an example of the practice, namely, that of a schedule of prices of a tender not accepted being laid upon the table of the House.

Mr. THOMPSON said if the contract in question was not a lump sum contract, a schedule of prices was necessary.

The PREMIER said the principle involved in the exposure of these schedules of prices was highly objectionable, and if carried out would lead to innumerable irregularities, as he had pointed out on a previous occasion; it was, he repeated, highly objectionable that the schedule of prices of any *bona fide* contractor should be published to the world. At the same time he had no objection, if the opinion of the House was opposed to his own; but he must again contradict the statement made by an honorable member opposite that in the other colonies schedules of prices were laid upon the table.

Mr. PALMER: You had better do so when he is here.

The PREMIER: Very good; then to-morrow I will read the telegrams I have received from the Engineers-in-Chief of Victoria and New South Wales.

Mr. WALSH said the question was not what was the Premier's opinion upon a particular subject, but whether the House was or was not to be obeyed. The question was, whether the honorable the Premier was to be allowed to set at nought the direct order of the House. He could see no harm in laying schedules of prices on the table, and when he heard that objections were taken to contractors, he was all the more anxious to see the honorable member for Port Curtis' wish complied with in the interests of the public. It was his firm belief, that if contractors knew beforehand that the prices were to

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Wednesday, 13 September, 1876.

Government Contracts.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS.

Mr. PALMER, without notice, asked the Premier how long he intended to take to copy the contract of Messrs. Overend and Co., which ought to have been laid upon the table long ago, according to promise. The work might be done in a couple of hours, or even in half-an-hour.

The PREMIER said the schedule would be laid upon the table to-morrow, and he might further inform the honorable gentleman that he had obtained information from Victoria

be published, they would be very likely to send in very different estimates than those which were sometimes sent.

Mr. BEATTIE said he could not see why the Government should object to the production of this schedule of prices. Every member of the House was aware that the Government, on the introduction of the extension of the line from Dalby to Roma, gave the House to understand that the contract would be for under £3,000 a mile; but at the present time, unless a schedule of prices was placed upon the table, there was no guarantee that the cost would not be £6,000 a mile. If it was a lump sum contract, there could be no objection; if the contract in question was on the schedule of prices system, it was what the House never intended. The promise of the Government was that the line should not cost more than £3,000, and he hoped there would be no mistaking that this was the clear intention of the House at the time.

Mr. BELL said they were re-introducing a subject that had been already settled. He himself could see no reason why the very fullest information should not be given of this and other contracts, but he could not agree that because there was a schedule of prices, there should not be a lump sum contract, since the one involved the other. At any rate, there was no reason why the fullest information should not be given as to any business between the Government and their contractors, or any other persons connected with it.

Mr. GROOM thought it was very necessary to have this schedule of prices, because he had been told that the Roma extension, instead of costing £3,000 per mile, would cost £6,000 per mile. He, himself, at the earnest request of the Premier, attended a meeting, where he distinctly stated that there had been an offer to construct a line of railway at £2,500 per mile, and the honorable gentleman intimated that if this line were to cost more than £3,000 he should not be inclined to go on with it. Yet, he (Mr. Groom) had lately been informed out of doors that the line would cost £6,000 per mile. The House must agree with him that this was a case in which the fullest information was required.

Mr. JOHN SCOTT said that, so far as his memory served, the honorable member for Maranoa did not say anything about schedules of prices; he spoke of the publication of contracts in other colonies.

The PREMIER said he might be permitted to remind honorable members that this contract was not made by him, but by his predecessor, and that the line in the aggregate would cost under £3,000, and not £6,000 as had been stated.

Mr. DE SATGE said the fact that there was such a rumor as to the probable cost of the Roma extension line was not a flattering compliment to the financial position of the country, and it was another reason for a new

system of railway management, under a properly authorised commission. To be Under Secretary for Works and at the same time Railway Commissioner was to undertake what it was impossible for one man to do. The question asked in the name of the honorable member for Rockhampton by the honorable member for the Kennedy was a very important one. A lot of money had no doubt been wasted by the importation of materials for the Northern Railway, *via* Moreton Bay. Ten shillings per ton had been paid for the direct passage out, while thirty shillings had been charged for taking the materials back again from Brisbane to Rockhampton. He believed things would never be satisfactory in connection with the railways until those works were managed by a permanent commission: with the session in full operation it was impossible for the Premier and Under Secretary to perform the work.

Mr. STEVENSON said he would take the opportunity of calling the very serious attention of the House to the matter mooted by the honorable member for Normanby, and of expressing the opinion that the answers given by the Government to the honorable member for Rockhampton were most unsatisfactory. The honorable member first asked whether the Government were aware that the construction of the Northern Railway had been delayed by the want of rails and fastenings? The answer was, no; but the honorable member surely ought to know that the construction of the Northern Railway had been delayed from those causes. The next question was, whether the Government were aware that for two years past traffic on the open line had been impeded for want of trucks? The answer here was also, no. But he was in a position to assure the honorable gentleman that the traffic had for some time been impeded for want of trucks. The next question was whether the honorable member was aware,—

"That while great waste has been incurred by the importation of materials for the Northern Railway, *via* Moreton Bay, vessels under contract for conveyance of immigrants to Rockhampton have, in default of railway iron, been compelled to bring out fire-bricks and blue-stone as ballast?"

The answer was :—

"The Agent-General was instructed, on the 16th July, 1875, to ship Northern Railway materials by every vessel sailing direct to Keppel Bay, or to Moreton Bay."

Was this the kind of answer to give to the honorable member for Rockhampton, and were his constituents to be saddled with these heavy charges incidental to the arrival of ships for Keppel Bay *via* Moreton Bay? He (Mr. Stevenson) could assure the House that the last emigrant ship arriving at Keppel Bay brought fire-bricks as a speculation to make up their dead weight while the whole works had been delayed through want of rails which might have been substituted for fire-bricks, and there was a difference of £1 a

ton, as the honorable member for Normanby had pointed out, in favor of direct shipment to Keppel Bay.

Mr. DE POIX TYREL said that, as a return moved for by himself, relative to an offer to extend the Southern and Western Railway to the border of the colony had been mentioned by the honorable member for Port Curtis, he thought it only fair to state that that return was moved for at the request of the gentleman whose name was attached thereto, namely, Mr. H. C. Ransome; and that he informed him that he did not think it desirable that such information should become public property. One portion of that offer was to do the work for a lump sum, which was, he thought, a most desirable form of tender. This was a question which he should not discuss now, as he hoped to do so more fully when the question of railway extension came before the House.

Mr. PETTIGREW said that with respect to the want of railway trucks, he might state that it was not Rockhampton alone which was suffering, for the Southern and Western Railways were also examples of the same defects. Produce had been left by the sides of the stations for days together because there were no trucks to convey it. As to the production of the schedule of prices, he quite agreed with other honorable members who had preceded him, that it was promised that this line should not cost more than £3,000 a-mile. A guarantee to that effect was given by the Government—by the Premier and the whole of the Ministry. The honorable the Colonial Treasurer said he would not mind going so far as £3,500; in fact, Mr. Macalister said he had a tender offered by Peto and Brassey to construct the line for £2,600 a mile, at a time when laboring men were getting a shilling a-day more than they were at the present time. He saw no objection in laying this schedule of prices upon the table, and hoped they would not go on with any more railways until they knew everything about them: there must be no more railways to cost what had been expended on the Brisbane and Ipswich line.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said the Premier, when he answered the question just now, was not aware that instructions had been given from his office to send rails, on order, by each emigrant vessel to Rockhampton. Instructions to this effect were given two months ago, and he believed there were vessels on their way out with rails on board.

Mr. PALMER said these explanations showed there was a great deal of mismanagement in the Agent-General's office in London, and he had no doubt, with the present Agent-General, and Mr. Hamilton at his side, all goods and materials that could be sent to Moreton Bay would be sent there. It was very strange that the Minister for Works did not know the business of his own office, but had to be corrected by the Colonial Secretary. He hoped the Premier would fulfil his promise to-morrow and let the House see the

telegrams he spoke of, and not only those, but the messages to which they were replies; because, as the Attorney-General would tell them, a man might get any opinion he chose according to the case upon which it was based.

Mr. McILWRAITH said he was sorry not to be in the House when reference was made to him. So far as he now understood, objections had been taken to the production of the contract of the Roma and Dalby line.

The PREMIER: No; the schedule of prices.

Mr. McILWRAITH said he had moved for a copy of the contract between the Messrs. Overend and the Government, for the construction of the two sections of the railway, and he understood some objection had been taken to putting that contract on the table.

The PREMIER: No; I spoke of a schedule of prices.

Mr. McILWRAITH said he hoped there was no intention on the part of the Government to obstruct him in getting the information he wanted. If so, he hoped they would let him know, because he meant to have as much information as he possibly could, believing that the House sympathized with his intention, and wished to have the best materials possible for the investigation he intended to make. If the Government had the slightest intention to obstruct him, they might say so at once, and he hoped the Minister for Works, when he brought forward his telegrams from the other colonies, would also produce the telegrams to which they were replies.

The PREMIER said the honorable member for Maranoa the other night definitely stated that it was frequently the practice in Victoria to publish a schedule of prices. In consequence of that, he got a gentleman to wire for information, and the replies were, that neither in Victoria nor New South Wales were schedules of prices ever laid upon the table, and that contracts were always let now by schedules of prices. He would repeat as to the Dalby Extension that the cost would be under £3,000 a-mile.

Mr. McILWRAITH said he had made no such statement as that which had been imputed to him, but the discussion would come on in due course to-morrow, and he would then show that the Premier's statements with respect to the other colonies were not consistent with fact.

Motion for adjournment withdrawn by leave.