

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 1876

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the House unnecessarily, he was bound to state that this was an answer which he could not but regard as extremely unsatisfactory. In the good old times, the Government preferred giving information upon a question rather than upon a formal motion, and it was with the view of giving the honorable the Colonial Secretary an opportunity of following this excellent example that he had put the question upon the notice paper. If the information had to be elicited in the way in which the honorable gentleman seemed inclined to force him to adopt, it would lead to a long and, he was pretty sure, acrimonious debate; it was, he should always maintain, a good old principle in former days for the Government to favor, nay, to jump at the opportunity of stating their views upon the mere putting of a formal question; whenever it was possible to do without motions it was done. It had always been the practice that, whenever a member asked for a return in which expenditure was involved, he must show that he was justified in moving for it; and when a simple question was asked for information to members, the Government ought to show an alacrity and willingness to give it. The Colonial Secretary appeared to be adopting a totally different policy, and honorable members could, of course, only gather that the Government were unwilling to give the information which had been asked for, and intended to put members to the trouble, bother, and confusion of listening to lectures in order to obtain information which ought to be in the hands of every member of the House. There had been no more important statement made than that made by the honorable the Colonial Secretary, namely, that the Government were easing-off immigration; it was a statement that demanded the utmost amplification.

The SPEAKER: It is not usual, I may remind the honorable member, on a motion of adjournment, to discuss the answer to a question put to a Minister.

Mr. WALSH said he would not discuss the subject of the answer, but the information given to the House at a previous sitting by the honorable the Colonial Secretary, to the effect that Government were easing-off immigration to the colony. No more disastrous statement could have been made in face of the circumstances of the colony at the present time, and it was of so much importance, that it had led him to ask the Ministry without the least possible delay to place such information upon the table as would put honorable members in possession of the facts which they had a right to expect. He was very sorry to find so important a subject as immigration—a vital question affecting the prosperity of the colony—creating apparently so little interest; the statement made the other day he considered was fraught with so much mischief to the colony, and was so diametrically opposed to the intentions of the people who had paid so much for bringing emigrants to the

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Wednesday, 20 September, 1876.

Immigration.—Ventilation of the House.—Western Railway Reserve.—Appropriation Bill.

IMMIGRATION.

Mr. WALSH asked the Colonial Secretary the question of which he had previously given notice:—

Will the Government place upon the table of this House, without delay, copies of instructions they have transmitted Home on the subject of “easing-off” immigration to this colony?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY replied:—

The Government are prepared to place the copy of instructions referred to on the table of the House on the usual order.

Mr. WALSH said he should move the adjournment of the House in order to say that though not disposed to take up the time of

colony, that it ought to awaken honorable members to a sense of the danger pending over the country if the system of immigration were mismanaged. He had asked the question in this belief, and to afford the Government an opportunity of placing the exact position of affairs before the House.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said the honorable member for Warrego, when he was in the chair, had laid down the rule that papers could only be laid upon the table of the House in three ways. First, by Act of Parliament; secondly, by command; and thirdly, by resolution; and if the honorable gentleman, following his own ruling, had brought forward a motion instead of putting a question, the information for which he had asked would have been on the table within a few minutes of the putting of the motion. But having adopted a course which, so far as he (the Colonial Secretary) knew of the practice of the House, was unusual, he certainly did not feel inclined to depart from the ordinary rules. The honorable gentleman might depend upon it that if he wanted information of this kind it would always be much the wisest plan to put a motion on the table in the customary way, and then he would obtain his information within an hour after the motion was carried.

Mr. WALSH said there was an easy way, no doubt, and of that he should avail himself by giving notice, but he was very glad at any rate to find that the papers would be forthcoming.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Oh yes; we have them now.

Mr. WALSH said he could remember, when members on his side of the House were on the Ministerial benches, that papers had often been put upon the table in anticipation of the request of honorable gentlemen. That used to be the practice, but now-a-days it seemed to be the aim of the Government to withhold and not to give information.

VENTILATION OF THE HOUSE.

Mr. IVORY said he would take advantage of the motion for adjournment to call attention to the intolerable ventilation of the House; they were either suffocated by the gas and foul air, or chilled by abominable draughts. Honorable members complained nightly of the inconvenience they endured; many of them were suffering from colds more or less severe, from impaired eyesight, and other ailments. Surely some measure might be devised to make the House a little more comfortable.

The MINISTER FOR PUBLIC LANDS said he entirely sympathised with these complaints, although he could not exactly say how these disagreeable defects were to be remedied; probably the House Committee, or some other committee, would take the matter into consideration, and if their deliberations resulted in any improvement, the House, he was sure,

would only be too pleased to be guided by their advice. It was quite clear some means must be found for getting rid of the foul air, and if existing arrangements were not sufficient, some others must be devised. There were some Legislative Chambers ventilated by the forcing of a regular current of air through them; in Victoria, for example, he had been told there were no windows, but the ventilation was perfect. He was afraid such a result could hardly be arrived at in the Legislative Assembly of Queensland; it was time, however, they arrived at some common agreement to secure personal comfort and prevent injury to health. For himself, he must confess that every night he caught a fresh cold, and he knew that the officers of the House and reporters were equally sufferers.

Mr. PALMER had no doubt that if the Colonial Architect were called upon, he would find out some means of meeting the difficulty. He had read of some very successful method of bringing the air from the outside under the floor, and into and out of the chamber by means of tubes.

Motion for adjournment withdrawn by leave.

WESTERN RAILWAY RESERVE.

Mr. DOUGLAS moved—

That, in order to enable the Government to deal with the lands in the Western Railway Reserve, and in pursuance of section 10 of "*The Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1868*," this House resolves to resume from the leases of the undermentioned runs in the Settled District of Darling Downs, the areas hereinafter specified, as described in the schedule laid on the table of this House of the lands proposed to be resumed from the runs in the said Railway Reserve.

SETTLED DISTRICT OF DARLING DOWNS.

(*Within the Western Railway Reserve.*)

About 20,000 acres to be resumed from St. Ruth's Run.

About 92,000 acres to be resumed from Jimbour Run, as per descriptions marked A and B.

About 10,560 acres to be resumed from Warra Warra Run.

About 29,400 acres to be resumed from Cecil Plains Run.

He said he had very little to say in moving this resolution, which he presumed would be to a great extent treated as formal. It was brought forward in virtue of the provisions of the Western Railway Act, the third section of which set apart a certain area of country as a railway reserve. The requisite notice had been given, under the provisions of the Act to all the holders of runs, and schedules of the runs, as required, had been laid on the table. The sixty days specified by the Act before the law could operate having passed, he now submitted this resolution to the House for the purpose of giving effect to that portion of the Western Railway Reserve included in the settled

districts. The area was not very large; it would be found very correctly described—at least described in such a way as to be well understood by honorable gentlemen—in the maps upon the table, indicating by blue coloring the portions which it was proposed to resume under the resolution. He should like to mention that there was one small area, being less than eight square miles, not included in the resolution. The Act of 1868 provided that no block of land of less than eight square miles should be resumed, and it had therefore been considered that it would be desirable, and in conformity with this provision, not to resume that small portion, which was known as Goomburra Run. The area of country described in the resolution, being reserved, would come under the operation of the Western Railway Act. Although the Government had no immediate intention of dealing with it, it would, no doubt, be dealt with in due course of time, and sold in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The maps showed the position of the lands, and the route of the railway, but no plan had been arrived at as to the way in which the surveys should be carried out, nor had any time been determined upon when the lands should be offered for sale, although, as they included land of considerable value, the whole matter would be shortly considered by the Government. He presumed the question would be dealt with formally, as merely carrying out the provisions of the Western Railway Act. He wished, in conclusion, to add to the motion a resolution, that it be transmitted to the Legislative Council.

The SPEAKER: Do I understand that the honorable member asks permission of the House to add some words?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes. I ask permission to add these words, "That the foregoing resolution be transmitted to the Legislative Council."

Words added, by leave of the House.

Mr. BELL said he was aware that it was useless for honorable members on that side of the House, or any single member, to oppose this resolution, because he believed it had been the determination of the majority to carry it into effect. He would, nevertheless, take the opportunity of entering his protest against the principle involved in the resumptions—against the principle of selling lands along the line of railways for the construction of those lines—on the ground, shortly, that it was not alone the lands bordering those particular lines that would be benefited by them, for the most distant places were benefited by every mile of railway that was made; and, therefore, one part of the colony ought not to be more liable than another to be sold to provide funds for the construction of railways. He objected to the principle, because the effect of it would be, if it was carried out extensively, to lock up all the available capital of the colony in

the construction of Government works, in place of borrowing that capital from Europe. He would take this opportunity to object to another principle involved in this resolution, or rather to a breach of faith—he referred to the unnecessary manner in which the lands which were held under lease under the Act of 1868 had been swept away from the present lessees. There was no good reason shown by the Government why the lands should be taken away *in globo*. It was never intended by the Act of 1868 that the lands should be taken away in this manner, and if it had been the intention of the Government of the country, there should have been compensation given to the lessees. The Act of 1868 stated that the land should only be taken in small blocks; but instead of this provision being attended to, it was taken away in one fell swoop, within a few years of the termination of the lease, and when there was no immediate necessity of selling it. The disposition of the land in this manner showed an utter recklessness, and breach of faith on the part of the Government, and the principle displayed was so bad that he looked upon it as one of the gravest errors made by this legislature up to the present time.

Mr. McILWRAITH said that in allowing the resumptions for one portion of the Railway Reserve in the unsettled districts to pass this and the other House, he did not see what alternative they had but to pass the resumptions in the settled districts also. But to pass the resumptions with the explanation given by the Minister for Lands, placed the Government in a difficult position. It was quite understood when the resumptions were passed that a large portion of land was resumed which it was very likely would never be required to be sold for the purpose of paying for the railways, and it was clearly the intention of the legislature, when the measure became law, that the lessees should be disturbed as little as possible, until the Government actually wanted the land for actual sale. The honorable the Minister for Lands was now asking the House to resume the whole of the reserve in the settled districts, and yet, in the same breath, he told them that the Government had not the slightest intention, at the present time, of making use of the powers conferred upon them. This was a principle of destroying one man without doing good to another. The Government ought to consider that all these runs were the property of men who had to finance to carry them on, and when the honorable gentleman said the Government had no intention of doing anything with the land—

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC LANDS: I beg the honorable gentleman's pardon. I said no surveys had been carried out; that there was no immediate intention on the part of the Government to sell, but that in due time the land would be operated upon under the provisions of the Act.

Mr. McILWRAITH said he could not see the distinction between his own statement and the honorable the Minister for Lands' explanation. What the honorable gentleman said was, that there was no immediate intention on the part of the Government of making use of the powers conferred by the resumption. If so, why did they resume at all at the present time? Why put out one single tenant, or why put one in an anomalous position? According to their own showing, the Government were destroying the financial position of a number of men, and doing no good whatever to the country. If it was the intention of the Government to sell these lands, no doubt they were acting in accordance with the spirit of the Act in asking the House to pass these resolutions; but the Government were acting quite contrary to the spirit of the Act in stating that they did not intend to sell those lands, but confined their attention to the lands at the far end of the reserve, namely, the portion near Roma, which, necessarily, would not be improved in value, so as to be fit for sale, for several years to come. In the course of a few years the runs on the Maranoa would be very much increased in value, and would fetch double and even treble their present price. The Government were rushing these lands into the market at the very worst time to realise a price, while lands that would realise a price were left in abeyance. If they acted as ordinary business men acted in conducting their concerns, they would first sell the improved property, and not sell property in the face of the fact that it would be increased in value if they simply held on; especially when they might sell other lands that had been improved, and would bring their full value at the present time. If the Government persisted in their present course, they would destroy any good that might come from the railway legislation of last year. He, himself, however, had expressed his disbelief in any good proceeding from it; he had predicted that it would be a failure, but he did expect that the Government which had carried that Act would do all they could to make it a success. Instead of this, they had done all they could to make that Railway Act a failure. That it would be a failure he had no doubt, and much of that failure would be attributable to the action of the present Government.

Mr. PALMER said that having spoken so often on this subject in connection with the Roma Railway, it was scarcely necessary for him to prolong the discussion at the present time. If he thought, by speaking, he could stop the selling of the lands of the colony far below their value, he would go on speaking, but he did not believe speaking would be any good; the Government were going on blindfold. As they were told over and over again, if they would first make the railway and then sell the land they would be likely to get at its real value, but it was evident they meant to

confiscate the public estate to satisfy some of their own supporters. But these things could not go on for ever; the country must, eventually, put the saddle on the right horse, and throw all the blame upon the party who were about to give away some of the very best of the southern lands of the colony—lands which, if the railways were made, would bring double and treble the price—lands which the Government were now rushing in and selling at 10s. per acre. But it was no use protesting against these things. The Government had already resumed the lands in the unsettled districts, and he presumed the others would soon follow; and he begged it to be distinctly understood, that though the Government might do this, they would do it under protest.

The PREMIER said he must deny that it was the intention of the Government to confiscate the lands, or give it away. When the time came to deal with the lands, the Government of the day, he had no doubt, would put upon them a price far in excess of the minimum of 10s. an acre; they would be more likely to fetch 30s. or even £2 an acre. He could assure the honorable member for Port Curtis that it was not the intention of the Government to waste the lands; if any honorable member thought that was the intention of the Government, he made a great mistake. Having said this, he would remind honorable members that this was not the proper time to discuss the principle of the measure, because the whole question would be raised next week on the Railway Reserves Bill. Until then, honorable members might just as well leave it alone; and he would state, in addition to what was said by the Minister for Lands, that the Government did not feel disposed at once to sell the lands; they were anxious the line should meanwhile go a little ahead—should be pushed on indeed as far as Jimbour. In doing this, the Government would be only doing what honorable members of this House were anxious they should do, and he wished the country to know that the Ministry did not intend to sacrifice the lands, as the honorable member for Port Curtis thought, but that they were determined to get the best value for them.

Mr. WALSH said honorable members were first told that the Crown lands of the colony—so jealous were the Government in preserving the rights of the squatters—were to be put up at prohibitive prices; they were going to put up the pastoral lands at £2 per acre. Would any sane man ever expect to sell any quantity of land away in this reserve to pay for a railway? The whole thing was a sham and shuffle, and all Government wanted to do was to tickle the whims of their supporters, pretending all the while that they were going to take away large tracts of country from the squatters. By this means they had surrounded themselves by a party; but they now found that warnings were being given, that the vital interests of the colony were in peril, and that a disastrous period would ensue if the

programme introduced by the late Government were carried out. The Government, he repeated, having taken warning, now tried to pacify members on the Opposition side of the House, by declaring that they had no intention of selling these lands, but at the same time they maintained that the railways were only to be paid for by the proceeds of the land. The honorable member for Maranoa, as honorable members knew, held the opinion that the best plan was to borrow the money, and let the lands fetch their increased value afterwards; but the honorable member was laughed at. The design last session was to proceed on a system of plundering; now that the present Government saw the difficulty they had raised throughout the country, and against the prosperity of the colony, they came down to tell honorable members of the Opposition that they need not have been frightened, for the Government had not the least intention of selling those Crown lands; and when they did sell them, the Minister for Lands stated, they were going to ask a price which they all knew, if there was to be anything like a large sale of lands, was absolutely prohibitory. Was not this an absurd proposition? Were not honorable members aware that the tax-payers of the country were not to be asked to pay the enormous expenses of these railways? Were there not honorable members on the Ministerial side of the House who deluded themselves with the belief that, under the great Liberal régime, the railways were not to be paid for out of the taxation, but out of the public lands? And at last the Government had come forward and openly announced that they did not intend to disturb the pastoral interests, and further, that when lands were sold, they were to be sold at prohibitive prices. Honorable members sitting behind the Government bench might be satisfied; but he felt that the country had been grossly deceived, and he protested that while honorable members on the other side of the House were met with the gilded promises that the railways were to be constructed without any cost to the tax-payers, the Government, now they knew they could not carry out their programme, endeavored to win over the support of the Opposition, by declaring that they had no intention of making away with the squatting interests, and would offer the lands at prohibitive rates.

Mr. IVORY said the Government were most inconsistent in their action upon railway matters. Why had they come into the settled districts and created Railway Reserves at the present time? Why should this particular piece of country be resumed, while in other parts they studiously avoided making any reserves in the settled districts? He had no intention of prolonging the debate further, but he should like honorable members and the Government to answer those questions for themselves.

Question put and passed.

APPROPRIATION BILL.

This Bill having been re-committed, and reported with amendments,

The COLONIAL TREASURER moved that the report be received.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the report be adopted.

Mr. WALSH said he did not understand the question. The Chairman, he believed, reported the Bill with amendments, but he was not aware that any amendment had been made in the Bill. If not, it was altogether wrong to say that the Bill had been brought up with amendments. He had no wish to delay the passage of the measure. No doubt the resolution of the Colonial Treasurer, that the sum of £150,000 should be granted, was very practically amended by a reduction of £50,000; but the Bill itself received no amendment, and he therefore submitted the motion could not be put to the House.

The CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES said, in examining the Bill, an error was found in it. An alteration had been wrongly made, by which an amount should have been £150,000 instead of £100,000, the former sum having been, as honorable members were aware, voted on a former occasion; the consequence was, that the Bill represented the total sum as £200,000, and not £250,000. The error having been discovered, it was amended by resolution of the honorable the Colonial Treasurer in committee. The question was put to the committee, and the error was amended. That was the amendment reported with the Bill.

The SPEAKER said that the Bill having passed through a Committee of the whole House, was reported with amendments, and when the Bill came up, his attention was called to an error, which he was informed had been made on the previous occasion. Therefore it was re-committed for amendment.

Mr. McILWRAITH said, from what he understood, the Bill as amended was exactly the same Bill as that which passed through the committee before committal, and the Treasurer's amendments were amendments on a clerical mistake made in transcribing the Bill. The error was not made by the committee, but by the Colonial Treasurer.

The SPEAKER: I am informed that the mistake was made in committee, the amendment to reduce the £150,000 to £100,000 having been moved in the wrong line.

Mr. WALSH said the question was whether the Bill, the third reading of which was now proposed, came up in such a shape as to warrant its reception by the Speaker. He maintained it did not.

The SPEAKER: The Bill is not submitted for third reading. What we have to consider is the adoption of the report received from the committee; the question is that the report be adopted.

Question put and passed.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I now beg to move—

That the third reading of the Bill stand an order of the day for a later period of the evening.

Mr. PALMER: Why not now?

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I want to get a new copy printed.

Mr. WALSH said the House was getting rather obfuscated respecting the Bill. There did not seem to be any immediate hurry about it, but it was absolutely necessary they should carry on the proceedings of Parliament in a constitutional manner, and he thought it would be much better to give honorable members and the Government an opportunity of correctly disposing of the Bill, by postponing it till to-morrow. This would make a very slight difference. He would repeat what he had often said before, that he considered a strict regard for the forms of the House as of the first importance. It would not be much loss of time to postpone the Bill for one day, but irregular procedure would not accelerate the progress of public business.

The SPEAKER: The question is, that the third reading of this Bill stand an Order of the Day for a later period of the evening.

The House divided, and Mr. Walsh being left alone on the Opposition benches,

The SPEAKER said: There being no tellers for the Noes, the question resolves itself in the affirmative.