

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

FRIDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 1878

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Friday, 6 September, 1878.

Assent to Bills.—Loan Bill.—Appropriation Bill.—Close of the Session.

ASSENT TO BILLS.

Messages from the Governor were received, informing the House that His Excellency had assented to—

The District Courts Bill;
The Maryborough Gas Company Bill.

LOAN BILL.

A message was received from the Legislative Assembly, transmitting for the concurrence of the Council, "a Bill to authorise the raising of Loans on the security of the Consolidated Revenue of the colony for the execution of certain public works, and for other purposes."

The Bill having been read the first time, and ordered to be printed,

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said, in pursuance of the suspension of the Standing Orders, he now moved the second reading of the Bill. He explained that it was to authorise the raising by loan of £1,184,800 upon the security of the Consolidated Revenue of the colony. He did not know that he should specify the purposes for which the money was to be borrowed, as the information was supplied at length in the first clause of the Bill; and as the sums arrived at had been determined by the almost unanimous assent of the other branch of the Legislature. The

works referred to were of importance, some of which it was considered undesirable to impede at present, leaving for the determination of the future Parliament the question whether they were to be carried on either by borrowed money in the manner indicated by the Bill or by the sale of land in the manner prescribed in regard to railway reserves throughout the colony. A large proportion of the money to be borrowed was for the construction of railways which had been already authorised by Parliament. There was a small provision for the construction of public buildings at different places throughout the colony; an amount for the improvement of the harbours and rivers along the coast; an amount for water-supply for Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Warwick, Gladstone, and Charters Towers; an amount for drainage works, Fortitude Valley; and amounts for loans to municipalities, and for the defence of the colony. The large item of £107,000 was included to make up the difference between the amount voted and the amount received under the Loan Act of 1877. Honourable gentlemen would recollect that the debentures issued under that statute carried four per cent. interest, and that they sold at 92½, leaving the balance of £107,000 between the amount actually voted and the amount received from the sale of those debentures. It would be observed that the sum to be borrowed under the Bill would become payable on the 1st of July, 1915. That was the time fixed by a previous Loan Act at which a large number of the Queensland debentures fell due; the intention being that Parliament should, at or about that time, consolidate the whole of the loans of the colony and have a re-issue.

The Hon. A. H. BROWN: There was one point that he should like to ask the Postmaster-General about. The honourable gentleman had directed the attention of the House to public buildings, for which £47,800 was set down. It struck him (Mr. Brown) and other honourable members who were better acquainted with the necessity for the works than he was, that there was a necessity for the erection of improved buildings for the Public Lands and Works Departments. Any person who had anything to do with the Lands Office in Brisbane must be struck with the imperfect convenience for the conduct of business there presented; the rooms were small and there was a great want of air. Indeed, so important a branch of the colonial administration—perhaps it was the most important for Queensland—should have proper provision made for it. He did not know whether the £47,800 included a sum for the erection of the needed buildings for the Lands Department; and, asking if it did, gave him the opportunity of directing the attention of the

House and the Government to the need for such buildings. There were many admirable sites for them; but he could quite understand the advantage of embracing the public buildings in one area, which would be very desirable for the public and convenient for the officials. It must be remembered that the Lands and Works Departments were increasing every year, and that greater room and accommodation were required for the transaction of their business. He saw very little difference now from what existed at the formation of the colony.

The Hon. J. GIBBON said he supposed that the Loan Bill followed as a natural sequence to the large sums of money appropriated for the construction of railways by the other branch of the Legislature. He must profess himself to be rather an obstructionist. The Parliament and the Government were going too fast, and he thought the Colonial Treasurer would find that to be the case when he put the present proposed loan on the London money market. The last loan produced upwards of 92 per cent. The Treasurer had expressed a sanguine hope that the present loan would realise 93 or 94. But there were accounts in this morning's paper of the state of the money market; and he (Mr. Gibbon) thought the Treasurer would be extremely fortunate if he should realise 88. Perhaps he should be laughed at for saying so, now—for talking of a Queensland loan falling so low, when the credit of the colony was so high. But he knew something of the loans. About three years ago he was at home in England, and he then himself purchased a considerable amount of Queensland debentures at 89. He knew that the country was committed to the construction of certain works specified in the Bill, and that they must be carried out; but, at the same time, he should counsel a good deal of caution before fresh expenditure was authorised. Of course, he knew that it was altogether useless to oppose the Loan Bill, as the necessity of it was generally recognised; but he regretted very much that it should be necessary to increase the public debt of the colony just at the present time, for such extremely doubtful purposes as the construction of a railway from Bundaberg inland, and from Maryborough to Gympie. He was afraid there would be no return from those works, and that the interest on the capital expended on them would have to be collected by a great increase of taxation;—reverting to the 10 per cent. *ad valorem* would be the least of the calamities that the colony would sustain by the present proceeding. But he was quite aware that it was too late to make any alteration, now, in the Bill; though he thought it quite right to express his opinion to the House.

Question put and passed.

1878—s

The House then resolved into Committee of the Whole for the consideration of the Bill in detail.

Clause 1—Power to raise money for special purposes.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he should take this opportunity to reply to the remarks of honourable gentlemen on the second reading of the Bill, because it was the first that offered: he had no right of reply on an Order of the Day. He quite agreed with the honourable Mr. Brown that the accommodation at the Lands and Works Departments in Brisbane was very imperfect, indeed; but no provision was made in the Bill for any works in connection with them. Indeed, if the Government had made any provision for the erection of new Lands and Works offices, something like £60,000 or £70,000 would be required for the double building. His own idea was somewhat in accordance with that of the honourable gentleman, that the whole of the public buildings should be in one compact mass. But he was afraid that the time was very far distant when that object would be realised in Brisbane. He was glad to believe that the honourable gentleman would assist in such a desirable object, and that he was not one to be influenced by the mistaken notion that because the public buildings were erected in Brisbane they were solely for the benefit of the city. A great many persons who did not happen to reside in Brisbane ran away with the idea that the construction of public buildings in the city was undertaken to suit the convenience alone of the number of people who resided within the four corners of the municipality. He did not think that works of such a character should be viewed in that light; but they should be viewed as erected for the convenience of the community at large throughout the colony. There must be a centre in which the Government must be carried on. It had been fixed that Brisbane was the centre. Although some might be of opinion that it was not so conveniently situated as it might be; still the fact remained that Brisbane was the capital of the colony, and that a certain amount of convenience must be provided for the conduct of the business of the public, for the benefit of the public. He was sorry to learn that the Council included a gentleman who was oppressed with the sad forebodings to which expression had been given by the honourable Mr. Gibbon; but he should be sorrier still to think that his anticipations of the manner in which the loan would be floated on the London money market were in any way likely to be realised. No doubt, if all public men were actuated by the fear which the honourable gentleman entertained of embarking in any public works, the credit of the colony would be very low indeed.

but he (the Postmaster-General) was glad to think that all parties in the Legislature were unanimous in the conviction that if this colony was to go ahead, they must undertake the construction of public works, which, although they might not be directly remunerative in the sense of returning, in receipts, a fair interest on the amount expended thereon, still would react most beneficially on the community, and would return twenty-fold at least in indirect advantages from the expenditure. If the Government of the day were to be as remiss as the honourable gentleman would wish them to be in undertaking works of the character indicated, Queensland would be a very inferior colony, indeed, amongst the Australian group. He (the Postmaster-General) did not fear, at all, as to what the loan would realise in the London money market; because he was convinced that an investor looking out for the employment of his money would find no colony that offered greater security than Queensland did for what was borrowed and for the payment of principal as well as interest.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

THE HON. G. SANDEMAN said, he hoped that the prognostications of the Postmaster-General would be all borne out by results. He very much feared, however, from the allusions made by the honourable Mr. Gibbon to the state of the money market at home, that it would be found, with all the various colonies borrowing at the same time to the extent they were proposing to do, that Queensland debentures would suffer very considerably in value. With regard to what fell from the Postmaster-General, that if the colony was to go a-head, as the honourable gentleman termed it, it must borrow money, that was a matter of course—one was the natural consequence of the other;—but the colony was “going,” as the honourable Mr. Gibbon said, “too fast,” and might go “too far a-head;” and that might be found to its cost before very long. A colony, with less than a quarter of a million of inhabitants and a public debt of ten millions sterling, was something unprecedented in the history of colonisation—except, perhaps, the case of New Zealand. It was known that this colony had borrowed, in proportion to its population, a far greater amount than any other colony under the British Crown, with the exception named. That could be shown by statistics. He believed that Queensland had gone a great deal too far in exercising its borrowing power, especially for works of an unproductive character. No doubt, whilst money was at a very low rate in the market at home, advantages were held out which might have led Governments, at different times, to go farther than they should have done. However, with regard to the question before the House, as the honourable

Mr. Gibbon had stated, it was not of the slightest use attempting to impede the progress of the Bill. With regard to the question raised by the honourable Mr. Brown, as to placing a sum on the Estimates for public buildings, he thought that was one which they must allow to remain in abeyance for some time. One thing he should allude to, in connection with that subject—and it had been referred to in another place—was, that there were some temporary wooden buildings being erected in connection with the Department of Works, which had been particularly mentioned. The danger of fire was thus rendered imminent in a department where most valuable documents were deposited. He did think that, although the Government were not in a position to spend large sums of money, at present, on public buildings, yet they should take care that they did not spend money in a way to jeopardise the public property. He feared very much that if great precautions were not taken, they might suffer a very large loss in the direction he indicated;—but he would say no more on the motion before the House, as it was now useless, under the circumstances, for them to discuss it.

THE HON. A. H. BROWN said he thought the argument adduced by the honourable gentleman who last addressed the Committee showed the accuracy of the view he (Mr. Brown) had expressed. The danger to the public buildings from fire had been described to them, and that was a reason why improved public buildings should be erected. He should be glad to learn, next session, notwithstanding the debt the colony was incurring, that the Government were prepared to erect suitable public buildings for the purposes required. He did not feel with the honourable Mr. Gibbon, that there was any great amount of danger to be feared on account of the public debt. In any business in which men embarked, he supposed they were all obliged to seek the money-lender, and were sometimes at his mercy. There was large security in Queensland for the public creditor—a great deal of property in the city and towns of the colony to be taxed very much more than it was at present—

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

THE HON. A. H. BROWN: And it was a gratification to him that means could be so easily found to enable the colony to satisfy the public creditor, and to pay the interest on the money borrowed. The principal was safe enough.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

THE HON. A. H. BROWN: There were a good many items of importance in the Bill; but he did not think it necessary to discuss them, as they had been agreed to by the other branch of the Legislature. He understood, now, that provision was not made for

the erection of the buildings which he had spoken of.

Question put and passed.

The Bill was reported to the House without amendment, and was forthwith passed through all its remaining stages, and returned to the Assembly.

APPROPRIATION BILL.

A message was received from the Legislative Assembly—for which, on the suggestion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, the Council had agreed to wait, pending the deliberations below—transmitting the Appropriation Bill of 1878-9, No. 2.

[The provisions are—That in addition to the sum of £100,000, already applied to the service of the current financial year, under the Appropriation Act of 1878-9, No. 1, the further sum of £473,086 19s. 6d. shall be available for this year; and a further supplementary sum of £103,512 12s. 5d., to make good supplies granted for the year ending the last day of June, 1878; also, a supplementary sum of £34,974 11s. 8d., for this year. In effect, supplies are voted to the 31st December, 1878 only, being half of the current financial year.]

The Bill was passed through all its stages without discussion.

CLOSE OF THE SESSION.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL, in moving the adjournment of the House, said: I have much pleasure in stating to honourable gentlemen that practically the labours of the session are now at an end, and that on next Tuesday Parliament will be prorogued, with a view to its immediate dissolution. In saying farewell to this present Parliament, I have to express my gratitude to honourable members for the courtesy and kindness they have extended to me during the time I have acted with them in the position I hold in the Council. I trust that if we meet again on the same footing as in the past, the cordial relationship that has existed between us will not be impaired.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

The Hon. A. H. BROWN said he could not allow the occasion to pass without a few words. He thought that courtesy and kindness to the honourable member was deserved by him. The business of the House had been ever conducted by him as the representative of the Government and leader of the Council in a very satisfactory manner to all concerned; and the honourable gentleman had displayed throughout his career amongst them very great ability, and also great forbearance at times when temper was tried considerably in the course of their proceedings. He (Mr. Brown) acknowledged this for himself and the House; and he, further, expressed the hope that if they met again, it would be on the same good terms, and that the

same harmony would be displayed in their relations that had existed in the past. He hoped, indeed, that honourable gentlemen would meet the Postmaster-General in the Council in the future Parliament.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

The question being affirmed, the House accordingly adjourned until half-past eleven o'clock on Tuesday next.
