

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates  
[Hansard]

**Legislative Council**

**THURSDAY, 8 JULY 1880**

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## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Thursday, 8 July, 1880.

Address in Reply—resumption of debate.—Leave of Absence.—Adjournment.

The PRESIDING CHAIRMAN took the chair at 4 o'clock.

## ADDRESS IN REPLY—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL moved that the debate on Mr. Ivory's motion, "That the Address, as read by The Clerk, be adopted," be resumed.

Question put and passed.

The HON. MR. FOOTE said that, in seconding the motion, he would express his earnest hope that the session would be satisfactory to all parties. He trusted the Government would see their way clear to the extension of railways, more especially that they would accept the proposals referred to in the Speech—namely, that certain capitalists at home would build a line from the coast to the Gulf of Carpentaria on the basis of land grants. The lands in the interior were of no service to the colony until access was made to them by means of railways; and by making railways on the system referred to the colony would be actually getting them for nothing—for while these capitalists got a considerable extent of land, yet that land was of no real value to the colony under present circumstances. If that system could be carried into effect this would be one of the most successful sessions of Parliament that Queensland had ever known. The importance of the colony ought to impress itself upon their minds more effectually than it had hitherto done. Its extent of territory was vast, its mineral resources were peculiarly rich, and a line of railway could hardly be run anywhere without tapping country suitable for agricultural, pastoral, or mineral purposes. He also hoped the Government would see their way to construct at least one or two branch lines of railway; for it was a fact upon which all were agreed, that, to make the present trunk lines remunerative, one of the most effectual means would be the construction of branch lines. There was no need to build these branch lines on an expensive plan. What was wanted was a sort of steam tramway. The advantages of such lines would be more particularly felt in districts like Fassifern, where the land was rich, and from which the farmers already sent large quantities of produce annually to the market. They would also find a market in this way for reproductive labour. Money expended on branch lines would be very remunerative, and, in addition, would be the means of establishing a large population on the land. It was a patent fact that the colony had to depend on an increased population for the means of obtaining an increased revenue. Without such increase of population they must abandon all hope of prosperity. There was not even the risk of failure in the construction of branch lines, for there were vast tracts of land which could only be made available by such means of communication. He regretted that the

owners of land stood out for such a large amount of compensation for the land through which the lines would have to pass, because they would be fully paid by the advancement in value of their property even if they gave the land for nothing. It was ridiculous to find men whose land was worth 30s. or 35s. an acre, asking £10, £15, and even £100 an acre for the land through which the railway would have to run. He hoped something would be done to enlighten such men as to their true position, for it was impossible to carry on branch lines if they insisted on such exorbitant rates of compensation. The prospects of the country at present were very good, and he believed the colony would reap satisfactory results from the Premier's late visit to England. With the hope that members of both parties would do their best to assist in the despatch of business, especially as they were later than usual in commencing the session, he would sit down by saying that he had much pleasure in seconding the motion before the House.

The HON. MR. GREGORY said he intended to address the House, not so much on the facts contained in the Speech as on the effect of past legislation. He should select those points which seemed to call for further action on the part of the legislature, rather than those the time for amending which had not come. One of the principal topics he had selected was the working of the Divisional Boards Act. Up to the present time that Act had worked much more harmoniously and more satisfactorily to all concerned than even its most sanguine supporters had anticipated. There was in it, nevertheless, still several serious deficiencies, and he wished to draw attention to them at this early part of the session in order that there might be time to remove these deficiencies by further legislation. The most prominent defect in the Act was that it contained no clear and well defined provision with regard to the main thoroughfares of the colony. It was left an open question as to whether main roads were not yet in some degree to be an extra charge on the revenue. His own proposition was that, unless in extremely exceptional cases, all roads should be placed under the control of the Divisional Boards. Several divisions had felt it a grievance that they had had to pay for the maintenance of the main roads, but he failed to see what objection they could take. Such large sums of money had hitherto been expended by the Government on these main roads, especially in the vicinity of towns, that they were now in a good state of repair, and the Boards were in a far better position than those further removed from centres of population where comparatively small sums had been expended for that purpose—in fact, the bulk of the work had already been done, and the maintenance of the roads would cost merely a trifling sum. He was glad to find this matter referred to in the Speech, but he would suggest to the Government that they should be exceedingly careful how they laid themselves open to the old imputation of "log-rolling," or give an opening to members of Parliament to claim for their various constituencies large sums of money to be expended in political corruption. A minor question in connection with this matter was, that in the Act no provision was made for the levying of rates upon lands the proprietors of which could not be found. In the Divisional Board of which he was chairman cases of that kind had occurred, and the rates could not be recovered by any process of law. Another point to which attention might be called was the control of commonages and public reserves. By the Act commonages were exempt from taxation, but there was nothing to show what other control the boards should have over them. It would be only reasonable that the

commonages within Divisional Boards should be placed in the hands of those boards instead of the trustees hitherto appointed, so that they might have the right of letting them and receive the rent for stock running on them, and otherwise utilising the material upon them such as timber and stone. Another difficulty likely to arise in connection with the Act was that timber licenses were issued under another statute, whereby the works projected by the local boards might be very prejudicially affected—in fact, it would be quite possible for men so far to interfere with the boards as to give a specific advantage to a certain tenderer for public works because they held timber licenses. He was aware that those licenses did not confer exclusive rights; still they worked to the serious detriment of the judicious carrying out of public works by the local boards. A further difficulty arose in connection with the serious increase of the Bathurst-burr thistle, which had extended more largely than most persons imagined. Attention had already been called to this growing evil, and he believed that if the facts had been more thoroughly known hon. members of both Houses would have taken the matter into far more earnest consideration. In the Bathurst Burr Act provision was made by which persons could be called upon to remove the thistles, but unless this power was placed directly in the hands of the Divisional Boards the nuisance would never be effectually put a stop to. In one division the Board had taken steps to get information laid against persons, but it had been done in a manner calculated to create hostile feeling and could not in any case meet the requirements in a satisfactory way. If the power under the Act were placed in the hands of the Boards they could work much more effectually than private individuals, as was at present the case. Another deficiency in the Act was that, while it gave the Boards power to open new roads, it did not give them power to close old ones in exchange. It was found easy to get freeholders to consent to exchange one road for another, but as they had not the power to close the old ones they had two roads to maintain instead of one. Another difficulty which was found in the outlying districts rather than in those near large towns, was as to what roads the Boards might choose to open or improve, and unless they were working in harmony with the neighbouring Boards the money would be ill-spent and there would be a want of uniformity of system, which might tend materially to destroy the utility of the works of each Divisional Board. There was only one way out of the difficulty, and that was for the Government to so far amend the Act as to admit of the general supervision and direction of the main lines of road being left under their immediate control without any reference to local boards. In connection with this general supervision of main roads, it might be necessary to consider whether some officer from the Works Department should not be appointed as a sort of central authority of reference on matters connected with Divisional Boards. No doubt in a few years the system would work easily and little reference would have to be made to that officer; but for the next three or four years, while large subsidies were being given to the Boards, it would be necessary to have some practical working branch of the department which would take charge of local questions. Difficulties had already arisen, and they increased in magnitude as they receded further from the country at present under occupation. The only point which struck him as being of considerable importance in the Speech was that relating to the construction of railway lines by land grants. When that question was before Parliament some time ago he objected to it strongly,

on the ground that it was tantamount to acknowledging that the Government was less capable of doing the work than a private company. Since that time a material alteration had taken place in the condition of the Australian colonies with regard to immigration. They had spent large sums of money for the purpose of inducing immigrants to come to the colony, but all anticipations of a marked increase of revenue derived from that source had been signally disappointed—in fact, the majority of the immigrants brought out at the cost of the State had only used the facilities afforded as a means of getting to other colonies supposed to offer a greater attraction. The class of immigrants sent out had also been of an inferior stamp, and it was not too much to say that the system had failed, and disappointed the expectations of some of our ablest statesmen. Such being the case, the colony was justified in making railways on the system of land grants, provided that the contracts were surrounded by really efficient safeguards. The system would also attract public attention and men of wealth and high standing to the colony, and would do far more good than if all the members of both Houses of Parliament went home to lecture on the advantages offered by Queensland. He would once more draw attention to the advisability of looking more deeply into the system of placing loans on the London market. Up to the present time colonial loans had been based on the simple principle of interest on a fixed sum terminating at a fixed period, when the capital lent was to be refunded by the borrowing colony, or extending over interminable periods, but still having to pay interest until it was thought convenient to pay up the capital. He had somewhat deeply studied the process by which the National Debt of England was managed, and he had come to the conclusion that the system of terminable annuities would prove far less burdensome to the country. In these colonies, if they had the courage to face the question at once, and began to pay off the debt in that way the moment it had accrued, it would not be long before they began to derive some considerable benefit from the process. The system of terminable annuities was one which would work even more beneficially here than in the older countries. If, for instance, they could put on the market a 4 per cent. loan at par—which he assumed for the sake of argument—they could put a 5 per cent. loan on terminable annuities on the market at probably 3 or 4 per cent. premium. And thus, for the temporary burden of an additional  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  per cent., the permanent debt of the country would soon be greatly reduced. In addition to that the credit of the colony would also be increased when the time again arrived for it to go into the market as a borrower. He felt sure that if the taxpayer knew that by paying a little more interest he would in time get rid of the debt, public opinion would soon be brought to bear on the question and the very desirable change effected; for although they might not live to see the day of reckoning, yet the advantage to the country in the near future would be enormous. He would not address the House further, as he should have abundant opportunities of speaking on the other matters mentioned in the Speech when they were brought forward in detail.

The Hon. Mr. HEUSSLER said he wished to say a few words on one or two of the most salient points of the Speech. He would refer, first, to the project of direct steam communication between England and the colony. It must have struck hon. members that the time of sailing vessels for these colonies had nearly passed, and that the bulk of the trade must now be done by steamers of great carrying capacity; and he was glad to find the Government inaugurating a new system of direct

steam communication with England. The only question in his mind was with regard to the subsidy, and whether the colony would be able to pay the sum which was required for that purpose. If the amount was limited the colony might be willing to make a little sacrifice for the sake of obtaining so desirable an object, but its main advantage would be the means it would afford for facilitating our trade in wool, tallow, hides, and such like produce, especially frozen meat. He had often thought it a pity that this colony was not recognised in the circulars of the great wool brokers at home. It was not mentioned by name as the other colonies were. It seemed strange that people specially interested in the trade had not long ago endeavoured to get Queensland inserted in those circulars. Now that the wool of the colony would likely be sent home direct in its own steamers, that would no doubt be altered. As to the convenience of these steamers for bringing out immigrants, the advisability of doing so might be doubted on account of the extreme heat of the latitudes through which the steamers had to pass and the crowded state of the vessels: still, there was no reason why the experiment should not be tried. He trusted that in any new scheme of immigration the colony would succeed in securing those yeomen who were at present seeking for new fields. Many of that valuable class had been attracted across the Atlantic and to New Zealand, and he did not see why this colony should derive no benefit from their exodus from the old country. Immigration from the continent of Europe ought also to be tried under better regulations, and he hoped the Government would not lose sight of that point. As to the objections made by the Hon. Mr. Gregory, that many of the immigrants only availed themselves of our immigration laws to pass from Queensland to other colonies further south, he might say that a careful study of the statistics showed him that the balance was very much in favour of Queensland. No doubt some of the immigrants left for the southern colonies; but, on the other hand, many from the southern colonies came here, and, balancing one fact with the other, the advantage remained with Queensland. He would like to make a remark or two with regard to the last loan. A great deal had been said elsewhere about the loss the colony had sustained by getting too small a sum for its debentures. In his opinion, which was backed up by many eminent financiers at home, they might congratulate themselves on the price obtained. It had been said that the presence of the Premier in England had little influence on the price obtained for the loan, but he had reason to believe that it exerted a very great influence indeed. The question of terminable annuities could only be regarded as an experiment, but it might be tried to a limited extent when the next loan was floated, which he trusted would not be for some time. Some years ago there had been some agitation for debentures registered to the holder; and it might arise again, as that form of stock was favoured by persons who had trust funds to invest. He was very glad to observe that the idea of constructing a continental railway out of borrowed money had been given up. He had opposed that system years ago, and had repeated his opinions at the time when the railway reserve system came into operation, because he held that it was impossible to do more than pay out of the lands of those reserves the interest on money borrowed for railway purposes. Now, he was convinced that even that could not be done, and he was therefore glad to hear that capitalists were willing to come forward to undertake such a large work; and he hoped the Government would see their way to

arrange to give an equivalent which would be fair to both parties. The prosecution of such a great work by a private company would do much towards opening up and settling the colony. He regretted that, owing to the low price of produce and expense of transit to market, the farming population were in a comparatively distressed state and appeared to be getting worse, and he therefore joined with the hon. gentleman who had so ably demonstrated that branch railways would be beneficial: neither speed nor very expensive construction was necessary. He had heard that it was intended to substitute steel for iron rails on some of the established lines, and he would suggest that the old rails should be utilised in the construction of other lines. He was glad to hear that land in the Northern territory was in demand, and could speak from personal knowledge of the success attending sugar-planting. To ensure a continuance of that success South Sea Island labour was necessary. In the Bill promised for the purpose of regulating that labour he hoped justice would be done to those who had embarked capital in tropical-produce industries; whilst the voice of the country was regarded and means taken to prevent that labour from overrunning the whole country. With regard to the Mines Department, he considered it was at present in a very unsatisfactory state. Having been requested to obtain some information about coal, tin, and copper mines on behalf of certain capitalists, he went to the Department of Mines for it, and was utterly astonished to learn that the Department only concerned itself about gold mining. In a colony like Queensland, so rich in mineral resources, it was necessary that there should be some office where, as in other countries, the fullest information about all kinds of mines could be obtained in a convenient form. The present Government, which claimed the character of a Government of action, should not overlook so important a subject. He was glad that steps were at last to be taken to conserve the timber of the colony and prevent the loss of its patrimony in that direction. Whilst congratulating the Government on their expressed intentions on this subject, he could not congratulate them on their silence on the subject of instruction in agriculture. The school system in the colony was very good as far as it went, but it was sadly deficient in means of bringing up men as they ought to be brought up. With a very little expense in all the centres of population, and especially in the agricultural districts, model schools could be established where youths could be taught agricultural chemistry, and also how to handle a plough and grow a tree or a vine. He had for the last five years unsuccessfully advocated the establishment of such schools, and he thought their introduction would be a great feature in the cap of any Minister of Education who would give his attention to the subject. Amongst the other Bills of importance promised he hoped there would be one to regulate the law of partnership. In the home country the continental law had been adopted, by which it was possible for a person to be a partner in a concern merely so far as a division of the profits was concerned. It was a limited partnership, and it was time the example of the old country in adopting the law was followed here. Many of the disasters caused by the non-success of small traders would be avoided if such persons could have the support of capitalists who might be willing to take a share in a business without incurring the immense risk that now attached under the present law of partnership. When speaking on the question of mining he forgot to remark that their coal trade was not at all developed, although they probably had richer

deposits than any other country could boast of. By a cheap system of tramways to facilitate the bringing of their coal to deep water something could doubtless be done to make the trade become an important one. He knew that some intelligent commercial men in Brisbane had spent many hundreds of pounds in endeavouring to bring the colony's coal under the notice of the outside world, but without result. The coal trade was also retarded to some extent by the narrowmindedness of the owners of the mines, who would not risk a few pounds themselves to develop it.

Question—That the Address as read by the Clerk be adopted—put and passed.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL moved that the Address as agreed to be presented to His Excellency the Administrator of the Government by the Chairman, the Mover, and Seconder, and such other members as may be present, at half-past 12 to-morrow.

Question put and passed.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

The HON. F. H. HART moved that leave of absence be granted to the Hon. G. Sandeman for one month, and to the Hon. W. D. Box for three weeks.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he intended at first to move as an amendment that the application of Mr. Sandeman be referred to the Standing Orders Committee; but on the whole, seeing that the hon. gentleman lived so far in the interior, and that it was very inconvenient to him to come down to attend to his legislative duties, he thought that leave might be granted, but he hoped it would be on the understanding that the Standing Orders Committee should deal with any further application. He believed that Mr. Box was in ill-health, so that he could hardly raise any obstacle to his request; but he trusted they should have no more applications for leave of absence, otherwise they should have to suspend business altogether.

Question put and passed.

#### ADJOURNMENT.

On the motion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, the House adjourned at half-past 5 o'clock until Thursday afternoon next.

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