

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates  
[Hansard]

**Legislative Assembly**

**FRIDAY, 30 JULY 1880**

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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Friday, 30 July, 1880.

Privilege.—Petition.—Motion for Adjournment.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 10 o'clock a.m.

## PRIVILEGE.

Mr. MOREHEAD said he rose to a question of privilege. During the discussion last night he and other hon. members had noticed that the Sergeant-at-Arms was not in his place, and he knew that the bell was rung by hon. members, or by the messenger, or anyone else who was handy. The Sergeant being an officer of the House had no right to leave his post without the permission of the House, and he did not think that his duties were so onerous that it was necessary he should be relieved from work or be allowed rest which was not allowed to other officers of the House—in fact, they might do very well without a Sergeant-at-Arms, and there was no necessity to pay £300 a year for a luxury. If they were going in for economy the abolition of the office of Sergeant-at-Arms was a good place to begin at.

Mr. HENDREN said the Sergeant-at-Arms was not a young man, and he had been in his place all the previous night. His position was an awkward one. He had to sit in the one place, and could not move about like the hon. member for Mitchell, unless when an adjournment took place. It was bad taste of the hon. member to bring up the matter.

The SPEAKER said he might inform the House that, late last night, his attention was called to the fact that the Sergeant-at-Arms had not got his usual rest, while the other officers had obtained rest through relieving each other. He then arranged that the messenger should take the Sergeant's place in order that the Sergeant might obtain some rest. He had no doubt the House would approve of what he had done.

Mr. MOREHEAD said he knew that the bell had often not been rung by the messenger but by members of the House.

The SPEAKER: I was not aware of that.

Mr. HENDREN said he took particular notice and observed that the messenger did take the

Sergeant's place, and if the bell was rung by members it was by the larrikin contingent who had no right to touch the bell.

The Hon. J. DOUGLAS said the hon. member for Mitchell had rather illustrated his contentious spirit by the speech that he had made. Exhausted nature must be relieved. The hon. member, he presumed, was human—he erred as other men did, and he slept occasionally. Why should not the Sergeant-at-Arms obtain his rest? In the present abnormal condition of affairs they might have to obtain an additional Sergeant, because it was impossible for one officer to be continually at his post. He did not know whether he should be in order if he spoke upon the whole situation, and how it had come about, but if he was —

The SPEAKER: If the hon. member does not intend to submit a motion on the question of privilege he should not continue speaking.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he was quite willing to submit a motion at the close of his remarks which would satisfy the conditions that the Speaker had imposed, but he proposed first to advert to the general situation.

The PREMIER (Mr. McIlwraith) maintained that the hon. member was quite out of order, and that the hon. member for Maranoa, who rose to present a petition, was in possession of the chair.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he understood the hon. member for Maranoa did not rise to speak upon the question of privilege, and if he was now in order he would —

The PREMIER said he must again submit that the hon. member was not in order. He understood that the hon. member wished to conclude with the usual motion for adjournment.

Mr. DOUGLAS: I do not.

The SPEAKER said he understood that the hon. member wished to submit a motion on the question of privilege.

The PREMIER said that unless the hon. member let the House know what his motion was, so that they might see whether it had anything to do with the question of privilege, it must be held that the hon. member for Maranoa was still in possession of the chair.

The SPEAKER said the hon. member for Maranoa undoubtedly rose before the hon. member for Maryborough, but he understood the latter to intimate that he was desirous of continuing to discuss the question of privilege raised by the member for Mitchell, and to submit a motion upon it, and he was entitled to do that.

The SPEAKER said it would be better to allow the hon. member for Maryborough to submit his motion. At present he did not know the terms of the motion the hon. member was going to submit.

Mr. DOUGLAS said his motion was to this effect—"That the Sergeant-at-Arms has been guilty of no breach of discipline by availing himself of the leave of absence granted by the Speaker."

Mr. MOREHEAD rose to a point of order. The hon. member moved that the Sergeant-at-Arms had been guilty of no breach of discipline—what had discipline to do with privilege? How could the hon. member move a motion of this kind on a matter which was purely one of privilege?

Mr. DOUGLAS said that might be argued when the motion was put. He had satisfied hon. members—

The PREMIER rose to a point of order. An hon. member having called attention to the absence of the Sergeant-at-Arms last night, the

Speaker rose and explained that that officer was absent by his leave; and now the hon. member for Maryborough moved a motion, which, in itself, was most disrespectful to the Speaker—that the House thought the Sergeant-at-Arms had done perfectly right in obeying his order. They did not want anything of the sort; they were perfectly satisfied.

Mr. DOUGLAS: That is not a point of order.

The PREMIER said it was a point of order. The Speaker was to be smoothed down, and patted on the back, and patronised by the hon. member for Maryborough asking the House to affirm that he had done perfectly right.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he intended to show that the remarks of the hon. member for Mitchell—

Mr. SCOTT insisted upon the point he had taken. An hon. member having raised a question of privilege the hon. member rose to speak to it, and subsequently made a fresh motion on the question of discipline which was totally distinct from the matter of privilege. He (Mr. Scott) did not say such a motion could not be made, but he held that the hon. member for Maranoa (Mr. Lalor) was in possession of the chair and should be allowed to proceed.

Mr. MOREHEAD rose to a point of order. There had been no charge of breach of discipline brought against the Sergeant-at-Arms; he had leave to absent himself by authority of the Speaker, and the matter was settled. No one denied the authority of the Speaker, the exercise of which was perfectly justified under the circumstances. To bring forward a motion that there had been no breach of discipline was simply absurd.

The SPEAKER said that what had happened showed the inconvenience attending the discussion of points of privilege on which debate occurred without any question being before the House. The hon. member for Maranoa rose before the hon. member for Maryborough to present a petition, thinking that the question of privilege had been settled, but the hon. member for Maryborough claimed to speak on that question before it was dismissed. He appealed to the hon. member for Maryborough whether it was right, in order to get up a discussion which appeared to be merely for the purpose of passing time, to refer to any officer of the House. He thought it was not a very dignified course to take.

Mr. DOUGLAS said from that point of view he agreed with the Speaker, and he wished only to be permitted to say that he had risen in consequence of the remarks of the hon. member for Mitchell, which he thought exceeded the due bounds of discretion. He did not agree with the hon. member that the office should be abolished, and thought the expression was an instance of the impetuous way in which the hon. member arrived at a conclusion.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. Palmer) asked what was the question? The hon. member appeared to be lecturing the hon. member for Mitchell—preaching to him, in fact.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he was in possession of the chair, and while he was quite willing to accept the wishes of the Speaker in the matter, he presumed the Speaker had not impugned his (Mr. Douglas') right to advance reasons why he should submit the motion of which he had given notice. He undoubtedly had that right, but in deference to the wishes of the Speaker he would waive it; but he took the opportunity of explaining why he took the course he did, which was justified by the impetuous action of the hon. member for Mitchell arriving so precipitately at a conclusion. Therefore, on the question of privilege he should not further detain the House,

but would take the opportunity of calling attention to another matter when the hon. member for Maranoa had presented the petition he was anxious to present.

#### PETITION.

Mr. LALOR presented a petition from certain selectors in the vicinity of Roma, asking for an extension of time for the payment of their rents, and moved that it be received.

The SPEAKER said, before putting the question he must draw attention to the fact that the petition asked that an extension of time should be given for the payment of the annual rents due on conditional selections in the Roma district, the selectors agreeing to pay interest on the money temporarily remitted. The question that had arisen in his mind was whether it was not a petition for compounding a debt due to the Crown, and he was therefore doubtful whether it should be put to the House. The petition did not ask for a remission of rent or a compounding, but for an extension of time; and the question was whether the extension of time asked for came within the 202nd Standing Order, which provided—

“No application shall be made by a petition for any grant of public money, or for compounding any debts due to the Crown, or for the remission of duties payable by any person, unless it be recommended by the Crown.”

The PREMIER said he had no doubt that the spirit of Standing Order 202 related to petitions for grants of money, whether it was a direct grant or a remission of a certain amount due to the Crown. The petition of these Roma selectors did not come within that. They asked for an extension of time and undertook to do what was not provided for in the Land Act—namely, to pay interest on the rents during the extended period. He thought in no sense of the word could that be taken as compounding a debt.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN thought the petition was the same in substance as the petition presented last session from the Prairie selectors, who asked for an extension of time for paying their rents, and the petition was received and referred to a select committee.

The PREMIER said the petition of the Prairie selectors asked a great deal more than this. It was really a petition to compound a debt. They were due to the Crown 30s. an acre, and asked to compromise the matter by the Crown accepting 20s. an acre; and yet that petition was received. He thought this petition was not against the Standing Order, as it was not asking the Crown to take less than it was entitled to.

The SPEAKER said he did not think the Prairie petition asked for anything more than relief. He had no wish to interpret the Standing Orders too strictly, but he thought it was necessary to call the attention of the House to the question, which was a very important one.

Mr. SCOTT called attention to the 271st Standing Order, which was as follows:—

“The House will not proceed upon any petition, motion, or Bill for granting any money, or for releasing or compounding any sum of money owing to the Crown, except in a Committee of the Whole House.”

He did not know whether this was proceeding upon a petition, but, if it was, it should be introduced in committee.

The SPEAKER said, having called attention to the point, and seeing that the House did not object to the reception of the petition, he would now put the motion of the hon. member for Maranoa.

Mr. DOUGLAS said that left the principle involved in the prayer of the petition still open to discussion.

The SPEAKER said on the question being put for the reception of the petition, discussion might undoubtedly arise as to the propriety of receiving it; but on the matter of the petition itself no discussion could be allowed under the 211th Standing Order.

Question—That the petition be received—put and passed.

On the motion of Mr. LALOR, the petition was then read.

#### MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he wished to call the attention of the House to another subject, and he should conclude his remarks with a motion for the adjournment of the House. It must be admitted that the present situation was very unusual and also very unsatisfactory; and it was also obvious that it lay in the power of the hon. gentleman at the head of the Government to provide means by which they might relieve themselves from the position in which they found themselves. What was that position? They were in a sort of state of siege. They had been obliged to have recourse to a practice that was only resorted to on very extreme occasions. They would not have resorted to these means of interfering with the business of the House unless they had felt that it was their duty to exhaust all the powers at their command to obstruct the ratification of the contract. He had already said that his chief objection to the ratification of the contract was not that he objected to the essentials of the contract itself, to many of the details, or to a mail service through Torres Straits—for he admitted that a mail service would be of great advantage, especially to their northern settlers—but his objection to the contract was that the increased subsidy for a mail service by Torres Straits was not justified at the present time in the financial state of the country till they knew how they were to meet the obligations for which they would become responsible under it. In reply to his inquiries upon that matter the hon. gentleman at the head of the Government had said that he should insist on their sitting from day to day, spending the long weary nights in frivolity and nonsense, in order that this contract might be passed by a certain day. He now wanted to know explicitly from the hon. gentleman whether any arrangement had been made with the contractors by which the date at which the contract was to be signed would be extended. It was certainly within the power of the hon. gentleman, having command of the telegraph wires, to communicate his wishes to the contractors, and he had no doubt that had he done so the date of signing would be extended. He should like to know, indeed, whether the hon. gentleman had not already availed himself of his opportunities, and already secured an arrangement for delay? Having secured a postponement of the date of signing the contract, the ground would be open to him to make his Financial Statement before asking them to ratify the contract. The hon. gentleman had been home a considerable time. The end of the month was approaching, for they were now at the 30th July; and he might now very well tell the House what day he had fixed for making his Financial Statement. He had already said he would be able to present it by the 6th August. If, however, he would present his Financial Statement at the present time it would take away a great deal of the difficulty felt by hon. members, and the House would be able to proceed to the consideration of those weightier matters that the hon. gentleman admitted remained to be dealt with. He had not had the pleasure of being present on the previous day when the hon. gentleman had referred to him (Mr. Douglas), and had charged him with obstructing the business of the House and preventing it proceeding to the

consideration of those weightier matters that he referred to. He had shown the hon. gentleman how the hon. gentleman was the cause of the delay by attempting to force his opinion on this subject upon the House. Let him submit his financial proposals, and he for one was quite willing, if he felt he had reasonable grounds, to accept the burden of this contract, and not interpose any further objections. There were many details on which he (Mr. Douglas) had not expressed any opinion, and indeed he had not expressed himself so strongly as other hon. members on that side; and he should not offer any farther opposition if he felt the Financial Statement made by the hon. gentleman justified the House in agreeing to an expenditure of £60,000 a-year on this contract. Not only would they become responsible for that expenditure, but the contract might lead them into responsibilities they were not aware of. The hon. gentleman said that he (Mr. Douglas) did not oppose the contract because he was frightened at the feeling of his constituents on the subject. That was a matter upon which he would be quite willing to meet his constituents, and he should only be too happy were the hon. gentleman now to give them an opportunity of testing how he stood in the opinion of his constituents at Maryborough. They were not very exacting, and he believed they considered he had discharged his duties to them as efficiently as they had been performed by the gentleman who had had the opportunity of speaking for them in that House. The hon. gentleman had also spoken of him (Mr. Douglas) as a sort of "boss" in the Maryborough district. Whether he was or pretended to be was not a matter of public interest; but he had his own position like that of any other member of that House. The Premier had been appealing, not to reason, but to force, arguing the contract must be ratified but that he would keep them in the dark as to his financial proposals till they agreed to it. He (Mr. Douglas) hoped the hon. gentleman would attain to a better light, and relieve the House from its present embarrassing situation. He hoped, therefore, he would receive a reply to the two questions as to when the hon. gentleman proposed to make his Financial Statement. He hoped when he did make the Financial Statement the hon. gentleman would be able to answer the second question, and tell them that he had made an application to the contractors, and they had extended the time within which the contract must be ratified. On these two matters he hoped the House would receive some information from the hon. gentleman. He moved the adjournment of the House.

The PREMIER said the hon. member had said that he (the Premier) had promised to make his Financial Statement on the 6th of August. He had never made any such statement—he never even indicated it. The hon. member had said that, having the telegraph at his command, he hoped he had applied for and obtained an extension of the time for the ratification of the contract. When the hon. member had previously suggested he should follow such a course, he thought the advice very foolish. He had not adopted it, and he did not intend to adopt it. The hon. gentleman had already had an opportunity of saying that the House ought to have the Financial Statement before it ratified the contract, and on that matter he had had the decision of the House against him. What the hon. gentleman wanted was that he should submit his Financial Statement, and then, if all things were satisfactory, he would have the approval of the hon. member for Maryborough. He (the Premier) had already decided that the contract should be ratified before he submitted his Financial Statement, and that proposal had been submitted to the House and approved of a long

time ago. It had been decided by a majority of 24 to 17. Was he now to go back and recede from the position he had taken up, and say that he would postpone the ratification of the contract till they had settled the whole matter of their finances? He would take his own course. The hon. gentleman was simply wasting the time of the House by making such a proposal. The hon. gentleman had sought to commit the House to his opinions by one of those "stolen divisions," as they were called by the hon. member for North Brisbane, but had not succeeded. The hon. gentleman had taken up a good deal of time that morning in showing the deplorable state into which the business of the House was dropping by this system of obstruction. He (the Premier) could see the evils of it as well as the hon. gentleman opposite, and the remedy was, according to him, that the Opposition should be allowed to manage the Government business, and that Ministers should take the hon. member's advice. When the hon. member had a majority of members of the same opinion as himself in the House he would just take the same course and manage his own business as he thought proper.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that what the Government had asked the House to do was to vote the money first and consider how they would raise it afterwards. That was not only an unusual, but it was an unprecedented course. It was worse than that: it was dishonest. Considering the large sum of money they already owed to people all over the world, if they proceeded to incur liabilities which they did not know how they were to meet they were no better than dishonest speculators who rushed into business and extravagant expenditure knowing that someone else would have to bear the burden. The Premier had said that it was necessary they should first approve of the contract. He (Mr. Griffith) quite believed it was necessary, for if the hon. gentleman had made his Financial Statement he would then get no person, even on his own side of the House, to support the contract. Therefore, it was necessary that the House should not be in possession of information. The hon. gentleman had never attempted to give any reason why the House should approve of the contract before he made his Financial Statement. It was not a mere matter of form; it was one of principle—whether the House could be compelled to pass a resolution for a large expenditure of public money without knowing how to raise it. Not an attempt had been made to show how it was necessary they should pass the contract. How could it be necessary? There were cases occurring in which they had to agree to an expenditure of money before they had determined the fund from which it was to be taken, and no objection was made to that; but this was a new and most important matter, and yet they had no idea how the money was to be raised. His belief was that some hon. members on the Government side of the House would be delighted to shift the responsibility of raising the additional taxation that would be necessary when once the country was committed to the contract. He did not know if the hon. gentleman cared for that. He would be contented to get the contract entered into, and leave it to the Opposition, or some other people, to find out how to raise the money. He did not want the responsibility of raising the money, and he did not believe the Premier cared for it either; in fact, he would be delighted to get out of it. The course pursued by the Premier made one suspicious. He would like to know who were the distinguished gentlemen who were the parties to the contract? Surely, a projected company able to carry on business for eight years, expecting to establish a large con-

nection and run in conjunction with some of the largest companies in the world, would not be bound to begin by the 6th August or not at all. It was preposterous to say the contract must be ratified on the 6th August. Would not the 7th August or the 7th September do? If it was a *bona fide* transaction for the purpose of carrying on a steam service, there could be no possible objection to the time being extended. The Premier had said he had had no communication with the company as to extension of the time. He (Mr. Griffith) wondered whether the Premier had communicated with the company at all—whether he had communicated with them on any other subject. They ought to know all the communications that took place between the Government and the contractors. He wondered, also, who were the representatives of the company in their negotiations. Gray, Dawes, and Co. seemed to have been the financial agents in the matter. As the Premier was able to tell them all about the formation of the concern, perhaps he could tell who would be the shareholders in the new company or who were to be the principals in carrying out its operations. Something must have been known of the matter when the Premier was in England. It was no secret. He (Mr. Griffith) had seen a letter from a gentleman in Philadelphia, in which the writer said he learned that the brother of the Premier had got a new mail service for the colony, and then proceeded to ask for influence for a certain purpose in connection with the service. How did the news get to Philadelphia? All that was known publicly in England at that time was that the British-India Company were going to get the contract. The Minister for Works surely would not accuse him (Mr. Griffith) of sending a telegram to Philadelphia?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Why not?

Mr. GRIFFITH said, evidently there was some mystery about the transaction. After all, what was really known about the projected company? They had been told it was necessary to vote the money before it was raised. The only necessity he could conjecture at present was that the House would not vote the money, if they knew how it was to be raised—or else there was something about the formation of the company that would not bear further investigation. It was ridiculous to suppose that one week or one month could make any difference. Then they should consider the amount that would have to be raised in case the contract came into force. There was already a deficiency of over £200,000 to start with, and that amount was not likely to be lessened next year; in addition to that there was £80,000 interest on the new loan: so that there was at least £300,000 to be raised by additional taxation, irrespective of the proposal before the House. He did not know which of the resources of the colony was so elastic as to be able to bear the strain of such additional taxation. There was certainly one industry which could contribute more to the revenue; but it was not likely that the Government would touch that industry. However, it was not his business to suggest how taxation could be raised; it was enough to know that they had over £300,000 to raise. They knew also that the Government would not be in office long, so that the responsibility of raising the money was nothing to them. Another thing they knew was what he might call the, to a certain extent, reckless character of the Premier, who liked to be engaged in big transactions but did not care who paid—he (the Premier) had not to pay. He knew that amount of additional taxation had to be raised, and yet he said, "Let me make this contract; and you find the money." But he (Mr. Griffith) protested against that course, and in doing so was taking up a perfectly constitutional position.

What would be thought anywhere of such a proposition as that which the Government now made? They asked the House to commit itself to an unknown liability without telling how to raise the money. What were the forms of the House for if not to enable a minority to insist upon proper discussion before they came to a determination? He did not believe in obstruction, in the abstract, at all. That the majority should rule was the principle of parliamentary government; but a minority were entitled to what they now asked for. It was quite certain that no majority in the House could resist the expression of intelligent public opinion outside; nor could a minority in the House do so either. He confessed that as a Queenslander he looked with considerable fear on the prospect of additional taxation before them. But the Premier did not care; he would tax sugar, tax tea, tax flour, tax salt—tax everything in order to appear before the world as a great contractor. Just imagine what a big man the Premier must have thought himself when he went to London. He had £2,000,000 of money to dispose of; then there was a large contract for £150,000 worth of rails—another fine thing; then there was the contract for £30,000 worth of freight to dispose of all in one lot; then there was a contract of £60,000 a-year for eight years, involving nearly half-a-million of money; and there was the construction of railways to the cost of two or three millions. What pickings for the friends of the Premier! They knew of some who had got pickings already. But just imagine what a man this was!—his acquaintance was worth cultivating. He was able to negotiate the largest transactions that had ever been undertaken in connection with an English colony—the largest transactions that had been negotiated at home for a long time. What an important person the Premier must have been with all those gigantic transactions on his hands! There had been no Premier like him from any other colony, and he was evidently of a speculative turn of mind. But however shrewd the hon. member was at making a bargain, those who had dealt with him had got the better of him to an enormous extent. Those big things, it must be remembered, were now to be carried through, and they were to be done at once. He did not think past experience ought to induce hon. members to be anxious to dispose of the matter before them without proper consideration. Some big contracts had already been made. With respect to the contract for rails, a very great error—and a most extraordinary error—had been made. The contract was made in a hurry and proved to be not to the profit of the country. Then the contract for freight was actually made after only three days' notice: and that certainly was not to the profit of the country. The Premier must have been a great deal more foolish when in London than he was generally supposed to be if he could not see what was going on. That was the experience they had of making contracts in a hurry. Then there was another contract made in a hurry—the Mail Contract. He would like to know the terms on which the new company was to be floated. The Philadelphia rumour said that Mr. McIlwraith, the Premier's brother, was to have the contract, and he thought it would be desirable that the Premier should give the necessary information as to who the real contractors would be—which was always given in such cases. The contract not only appeared to have been made in a hurry, but now it appeared was not drawn out properly. Was it rational to pass things in that way—to pass a resolution involving the expenditure of an unknown sum of money for a long time without knowing

where it was to come from? He had never seen such a contract in all his experience in the Crown Law Office or out of it. In all the contracts he had anything to do with there was always a provision against assigning a contract without the consent of the Government. The Premier had explained the matter by saying that a company was to be formed for carrying out the contract. But lately they had been gaining experience; and they knew that where middle-men were employed a good deal of money stuck in the hands of somebody. It was all very well to talk of the respectability of the parties to the transaction; but even respectable men would not assign a contract for nothing. No matter how respectable people were, when they had valuable property to dispose of they did not sell it for nothing. He did not know anything about the company. No doubt Mr. MacKinnon was a man of eminent respectability and great wealth; but still, if he got a contract and could dispose of it profitably he would do so. They did not know so much about the other members of the company. Gray, Daves, and Co., however, seemed to be the financial agents, and they might be the promoters. There were many things in connection with the contract which everybody would like to know; and there was so much that was unusual that one was inclined to be suspicious. It was an old maxim in law that when unusual conditions were attached to a transaction and there was anything secret about it, it led to a suspicion of fraud. He had endeavoured to consider the matter as a *bona fide* transaction; but the Premier was so anxious to do big things in a big way, and to be known in the commercial world as a great magnate—more so probably than in the political world—that he appeared to be entirely carried away by that feeling. And, after all, he had made a bad bargain. When they found those unusual conditions, the reticence on the part of the Government, and their refusal to give information, the plea of urgency and the absolute necessity to do the thing in a few days, they might well oppose the contract; and, considering the unusual conditions and the secrecy maintained, they were led to view the matter with suspicion. If mail contracts were like rails or galvanised-iron, he could understand why there should be such a hurry. They found, for instance, in contracts for rails, offers for the supply to remain open till such a day or such an hour. That was because the market was unsettled and the price to be paid by contractors might be very much increased. In the same way, when land was offered for sale, the offers remained open till a certain day. But, whoever heard of such a thing in connection with a mail contract? What could be the object of the contracting parties in fixing the 6th August? Why must the contract be off if not passed by then? If there was a large fleet of steamers waiting to be employed in the service he could understand why the contractors should stipulate for a certain day after which the bargain should be off. But that was not the case at all; and what, then, was the reason for such an unusual stipulation? The Premier asked them to vote the money; but would not give them the information asked for. He spoke of having a majority of 24 to 17; but, strictly speaking, he had only a majority of 24 to 21. And he (Mr. Griffith) took it that a minority of 21—a minority of nearly half the House—were perfectly justified, not in dictating to the Government what they should do—for that was a position he did not think a minority should take up—but in asking and insisting that the ordinary safeguards and the ordinary rules of procedure should be applied to the subject before them. They should not be asked to spend money

till they knew where it was to come from. He supposed that hon. members were all aware that the forms of the House were invented to allow a minority to defend themselves from being ridden over and trampled upon by the majority. The Government said they had a majority in the House, but how had they got it? Here was a question put forward, on which they expressed their intentions to stand or fall. They knew they would have a determined opposition, and could not carry it on its merits, and therefore made it a party question. That opposition, however, would have been very different had the Premier not tried to thrust the contract down the throats of hon. members on his (Mr. Griffith's) side of the House. It was useless for the Premier to say that he had a majority and could therefore do as he liked. A majority in the House could not take that position. A majority in the country should undoubtedly control legislation, but a majority in the House, if proceedings were conducted in accordance with parliamentary usage, could not always have its own way. The position taken up by the Premier had always been this—that a minority in the House was not wanted—that, if they spoke against any proposition put forward by the majority, they were only wasting time, and that, as Premier, whatever he said should be done should be carried in spite of any minority. That was the position taken up by the Premier, and if things had not lately gone on just as he wished the hon. gentleman had himself alone to blame for it. He (Mr. Griffith) regarded the stoppages of parliamentary business by talking against time as very injurious—and not being parliamentary government at all—in fact, they were proceedings of almost a revolutionary character. In some countries where a majority in the House had ceased to command the confidence of the people, the remedy resorted to was revolution, and the majority was put out by force; but, fortunately, they had been taught by a long course of history to adopt a different mode of procedure, and to put out a Government by constitutional means. And who was it who was now making a new departure from that mode of procedure? Not the Opposition, as they were merely insisting, by resorting to a proper parliamentary proceeding, on the proper protection of the people. The Government, however, said, "No; we are a majority, and whatever we say is law." He (Mr. Griffith) contended that if the Premier made parliamentary government impossible in the colony he was alone to blame for it. He would ask hon. members opposite whether this matter of a postal contract was worth disturbing the course of parliamentary government to an extent that it might take the colony years to get over? The Premier said "I must have the contract ratified by next Friday: I will not tell you how I propose to get the money to pay for the service, but I must have that service." Surely that was not the position the hon. gentleman should take up. Hon. members on his (Mr. Griffith's) side of the House recognised the rights of a majority, but they said that that majority must, in carrying on their Government, conform with the true principles of constitutional government. It was just as much a principle of constitutional government that before entering into a contract for the expenditure of money it should be shown from what source the money was to come, as it was that a majority should carry on the business of the country. He would again take the liberty of reminding the Premier of something the hon. gentleman was told when he was in office before. He was told by his then chief that his temper unfitted him for office. There was no doubt that the great failing of the hon. gentleman when in office was his temper—in-

as much as when he took anything into his head and said it should be done he obstinately persisted in doing it. The Opposition were not going to be governed by a despot, and the manner in which the Government were pressing on this mail-service showed simply a desire on their part to introduce something like despotism. They knew that there were plenty of hon. members on their side who did not agree with them in regard to the proposed service, but they said that if they could not have their own way in the matter—which was a matter of obstinacy—they would resign. No doubt hon. members opposite looked with horror on such an alternative—on the possibility of a Government being formed out of the present Opposition—what fearful consequences might ensue from such a thing to the hon. member for Gregory, for instance, and others, greatly interested in the western country! He could quite understand their contemplating such a position with dismay, and saying that although they did not approve of the proposed mail contract they must vote for it in preference to accepting the other alternative. There were many members opposite who did not scruple to say when outside of the House that they hoped the contract would not be ratified, and yet they were compelled by the circumstances of party to give their support to the Government. However, he had seen a similar course to the present adopted on many occasions. In 1871, when he was not a member of the House, it was carried on, and again in 1872, when he was a member, the position taken up was very much the same as now. In that year the Government met the House in March without having the Estimates for that year passed—the financial year at that time ending in December—and they insisted on the House passing the Estimates before they proceeded with any other business. The Opposition, however, demanded that before Supply was granted the Government should, according to promise, proceed with a Bill for the redistribution of the electorates, and eventually the Government had practically to give way. The Opposition then proceeded on the old constitutional principle of redress of grievances before granting Supply. He was now referring to the deadlock of 1872, which he had something to do with ending. That was the position then taken up by the Opposition, although the Estimates were for the current year and not for the next year, and they carried on the deadlock until they had a guarantee that the Redistribution Bill would be passed. The position the Opposition then held was not so strong as it was now. They now insisted that before a large sum of money was to be expended out of additional taxation it should be shown what that taxation was to be. If the Government would show how the deficiency of £300,000 was to be met, it would be something; but, instead of doing that, they now proposed to add to that liability a further sum of £55,000. One thing was certain, that they would have to go most enormously in for retrenchment or most heavily into taxation. Supposing they doubled the *ad valorem* duties and put a duty on flour and on salt, there would still be a deficiency before they came to the £55,000 at all. After all, the financial position of the colony was the most important thing to be considered. It was all very well for hon. members opposite to laugh—"Nero fiddled whilst Rome was burning";—but the whole thing was, in reality, nothing more than gambling: it was incurring liability and trusting to chance to have the means of meeting it. He believed the opinion of some hon. members opposite was that they should first incur a liability and then see how to meet it; but his (Mr. Griffith's) opinion had throughout life been never to incur a liability without first knowing that there were the means to meet it. He decidedly objected to

the prospect of either being permanently enormously burdened by taxation, or of being driven out of the colony.

Mr. LUMLEY HILL: You will always be able to get pickings enough.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he feared if the Government pressed the country to the extent they seemed inclined to people would not be able to afford litigation, and he should have to seek some other country. But this was a very serious matter, as the country was not in a position to be more heavily taxed. In New Zealand, he was told, there was to be a tax of 20 per cent. on furniture.

Mr. DOUGLAS: And 6d. a-gallon on beer.

Mr. GRIFFITH said, unfortunately the consumers had to pay these taxes. If the Ministry were likely to suffer themselves, there would be some guarantee—through the motive of self-preservation—that they would not impose burdens on the people which would be oppressive. But hon. members had no such guarantee as that—they only knew that enormous burdens would have to be borne, and that somebody would have to bear them. In the meantime, they were told in a lighthearted way by the Premier, "You vote the money, and you will have to raise it—if you buy the candle, you will have to pay for it." But hon. members wanted to know the price they were to pay for the candle.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN: And you'll snuff it.

Mr. GRIFFITH said it was possible that all the wax might melt away and leave behind nothing but the paper on which this contract was written.

Mr. MOREHEAD: And smoke.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that from 1872, when the Opposition undertook to prevent the Estimates from passing, until last year, the House had received many lessons in the art of obstruction, and in most of the instances which had occurred the hon. member for the Mitchell had been the organizer.

Mr. MOREHEAD: The organ-grinder.

Mr. GRIFFITH: The organizer.

Mr. MOREHEAD: You have described your side as undertakers—to bury the Ministry, I suppose.

Mr. GRIFFITH said in the cases to which he had referred small minorities had refused to vote money on account of some personal animosity towards the proposed recipient. Of course, they stated that a great public principle was involved, but that principle did not become manifest until the gentleman—whose just claim it was proposed to settle—changed his seat in the House. The only principle that he could discover in that transaction was, that it was wrong for any party to vote any money to anyone but themselves. That attempt at obstruction was successful, because the matter involved was not of sufficient importance to be fought out. But things of that kind could not last for ever. Time cured all things, and would effect an improvement—

Mr. MOREHEAD: Will it improve you?

Mr. GRIFFITH said he hoped so—it had improved the hon. member very considerably during the twenty years he had known him. The position occupied by the Opposition today was quite different. The action taken by the Government was quite inconsistent with the principles of parliamentary government. They had hurried the discussion and taken up the position that they were a majority and that the minority had no rights. All the Ministers were of a despotic frame of mind.

The Colonial Secretary had been known as a despot ever since he had been in Australia: and hon. members had seen what the Premier was. The Minister for Works was also despotic—there was no greater despot than a red republican if they gave him power.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Mind what you are saying!

Mr. GRIFFITH said he did not use the word in an offensive sense. In the metaphorical sense he intended the hon. member was republican.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Not red.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he meant an extreme republican, but not one of those who went about advocating the introduction of the guillotine. He would use the word democrat, if the hon. member liked that better, and say that in old times it had been laid down that a democracy always ended in a tyranny—some man got into power and turned himself into a tyrant or despot. In the surrounding colonies the same thing was to be seen—no more despotic Ministry had existed in Australia than that of Mr. Berry, who was a most violent democrat. The Minister for Lands was despotic in a somewhat different sense—he was of an imperious character, managing his own office with very great firmness and strength of will. That was a very good thing in administration, and he believed the hon. gentleman was a good administrator. He was, however, one of a type of men who did not understand that in parliamentary government moderation and conciliation were very necessary indeed. The present Government were inclined to trust too much to brute force. With regard to the other members of the Ministry, hon. members had hardly had sufficient experience of them to express an opinion. He did not know the Postmaster-General's turn of mind, but he was inclined to think he was the one man in the Ministry who prevented them from driving themselves to destruction—the one who occasionally counselled wisdom and moderation. The Attorney-General had not been sufficiently long in office to make his disposition known. The hon. member for the Mitchell, who, according to the hon. member for Moreton, was to be regarded as one of the Ministry—

Mr. MOREHEAD said he was not one of the Ministry.

Mr. GRIFFITH said he was very sorry that the hon. member was not. He wished that the Government had the advantage of the common-sense and moderation of the hon. member. If that hon. member had had the ordering of the business during the session the House would not be in the position it now was, and hon. members would not be kept in their places day after day and night after night because the Government had put before them a preposterous contract which no reasonable merchant could approve of. He did not think the Minister for Lands, either, would have allowed matters to take such a course; but the temper of the Premier would not permit him to give way, and now a great strain was being put upon our parliamentary institutions from which no practical good in the direction desired by the Premier could result. Practical good would come out of it as it did from every struggle, because every such procedure was a step towards the settlement of our institutions on a satisfactory basis. He hoped it would not become necessary, through the exhibition of temper on the part of the Government, to have recourse to the form of government adopted in some of the South American republics; but it was in that direction that such exhibitions of obstinacy tended. Therefore, he trusted that wiser counsels would prevail, sufficient reason having been shown for not proceed-



ing to the Orders of the Day. He also ventured to hope that the Government would give some further information, and say whether any communication had been received from the contractors, not with reference to the extension of time only, but to any other matter with regard to which the House was entitled to be informed.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS said he had not intended to follow the hon. member for North Brisbane, but that hon. gentleman had, as usual, wandered away from the subject, and had throughout his speech showered imputations against the Ministry broadcast. He had, it appeared, got hold of a telegram from Philadelphia in which it was stated that a member of the McIlwraith clan—as the connections of the Premier had been called—had something to do with this mail contract. He had also, he said, observed that there was an unusual condition in the contract which was very suspicious, and that there was secrecy, which was also very suspicious. There was nothing more secret about this contract than about any other contract. The unusual condition could be very easily explained. The Premier did not say that it was necessary to ratify this contract before the Financial Statement was made, because if the Financial Statement was made first the contract would never be ratified.

Mr. GRIFFITH: No; I said that—

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: You left it to be implied that the Premier said so.

Mr. GRIFFITH: I didn't, indeed.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS said he could explain how the necessity arose. The hon. gentleman knew very well, but he wished to mislead the outside public opinion to which he had alluded—which meant the opinion of Brisbane only, for the hon. gentleman did not dare to appeal to any other public opinion. He knew that the necessity arose in this way: The contract stated that in order to make it binding upon the contractors it must be ratified within three months of the date of contract, which three months would expire on the 6th August; and the reason of that condition was that the contractors had undertaken to commence their service as soon as the present service by the E. and A. Company ceased, as it would do in the month of October: and they required at least two months to make the necessary preparations. But then hon. members knew, and the people in the North knew, that the Opposition did not care whether the mails were carried through Torres Straits or not—they would rather prefer that no mails should be carried that way.

Mr. GRIFFITH: No.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS said it was a simple question of whether the people of the North were to be inconvenienced or not. That depended upon the action of the Assembly in ratifying or refusing to ratify the contract by Friday next. It was no use creating any mystery about the ratification—that was the question pure and simple, and the Government did not desire that three parts of the colony should be without mails. The hon. gentleman also made many insinuations about the Premier being a man for big things. The hon. gentleman had spoken several times about our duty as honest men. It was not honest of him to make insinuations, as he did time after time, about dishonesty—it was the work of a cowardly man who had not the courage to say boldly what he meant. The hon. gentleman knew that if he dared to utter such insinuations outside the House he would be called to account in one way or the other. He was never a brave man, and he was certainly not an honest man or he would not make such insinuations. He talked about the Premier not

caring who paid, because he (the Premier) would not—he would leave the colony. As a matter of fact, no public man could leave the colony, or was so likely to leave the colony, as the hon. gentleman himself. It was not such a long time since it was reported that the hon. gentleman intended to leave the colony.

Mr. GRIFFITH: I heard nothing about it.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS had heard the subject debated in the Library and the Refreshment Rooms. What had the hon. gentleman in the colony to anchor him to it? No man could leave the colony more easily—what had he got in the colony?—he had simply to let or sell his house and go away, full sail. Could the Premier leave the colony as easily?—could he find any individual as readily to take up the properties he possessed in the colony? The hon. gentleman talked about the Premier not paying. He made bold to say that the Premier paid more in taxation—he did not include rents—in one month than the hon. gentleman paid in twelve. As for “pickings” out of contracts, the hon. gentleman ought to have carefully avoided that word, for it was very suggestive. He would now turn to the constitutional question. The hon. gentleman had been trying to impress upon them that, to be constitutional, they should permit the minority to rule the country. That was the meaning of the whole of his address. He said the Government were forcing the will of the House. The will of the majority of the House was the will of the House, and it was impossible to force a majority. Since the present Ministry came into office the majority had, on frequent divisions, expressed their confidence in them—an absolute majority of the members of the House. Therefore, such expressions of confidence in the Ministry was the expression of the House; and that was the only way that the will of the House could be arrived at. The hon. gentleman then said “Because you have a majority, and we are in a minority, you ought to compromise the matter, and let us tell you how to carry on the business.” In a question of this kind there could be no compromise. It was not like a Bill which was laid on the table to be altered or amended. Nearly all matters of legislation were questions of compromise, but this was an Executive act, an agreement entered into between the Premier and certain contractors in England, and yet it was to be compromised in such a way as to compel the contractors not to accept the contract. The hon. gentleman appealed to the practice in countries that possessed a certain kind of representative government, but yet were continually in a state of revolution. This colony would soon come to that condition if they admitted for a single moment that a minority were justified in using the forms of the House, which were intended for quite another purpose, in stopping not only legislation but the work of administration as well. The forms of the House were intended to prevent Ministries from snatching divisions by surprise; and he challenged the hon. gentleman to point out a single instance in the history of England where the powers of the House were used to stop legislation. Supposing the hon. gentlemen were successful, and that by a continuous course of obstruction the present Ministry were driven from office, what was to prevent their successors from sharing a similar fate? And then they would gradually drift into the position that members would get so utterly regardless of form that they would decide by the sword what should be decided by fair discussion. Very lately, in Victoria, revolution was spoken of, and if it was once permitted that a minority should rule the country, because it happened to have the ear of a certain portion of the people of the capital,

there would be an end to all parliamentary government; and when that was ended, into what a sea would they be launched! The hon. gentleman had mixed up certain things in his speech which had no connection whatever with the contract. He told certain Government supporters that it would be a horrible thing for them if a Ministry were formed from gentlemen on the Opposition benches. They did not think so, however, because there was never a time in the history of the colony when squatters got so many concessions as when the so-called Liberals were in office. The hon. gentleman then said that what with the deficit, and the £80,000 for interest on the two-million loan, and the £55,000 for the mail service, there would be an increase of £355,000 to be raised this year by taxation, and he urged that before the contract was passed the Premier should tell the House how he was going to raise the money. What had the contract to do with the taxation? Supposing the contract was not ratified, and admitting, for the sake of argument, that the hon. gentleman was correct in his figures, £300,000 out of the £355,000 must be raised. What was the use, therefore, of trying to muddy the water by telling the people that the ratification of the contract meant that £355,000 would have to be raised by taxation? The hon. gentleman forgot that out of that £55,000 they were already paying £20,000 for the Torres Straits service, so that, in reality, the total amount to be raised was only £35,000 more than at present. The honourable gentleman accused the Ministers of being despots. He maintained that they were not, and that they had been more conciliatory to the Opposition than ever the Opposition had been when in power. Before the hon. gentleman began to "stonewall" this question had been debated for five nights—a thing unprecedented on such a question; and yet the hon. gentleman called them hasty, impulsive, and despotic. He could point to an act of despotism which would have justified far more obstruction, and that was when the hon. gentleman brought in a bunch of six railways and insisted upon their taking the whole or none. They succeeded in forcing their railways on the House simply because the then Opposition had too much respect for parliamentary government to "stonewall" on the question. As a protest, they obstructed for not more than twenty-four hours, and then gave way, throwing the responsibility upon the then Government. What had been the result? They were paying a far larger amount of interest upon some of those railways, which would not pay for the next fifty years, than the £35,000 which would be incurred by the mail contract.

Mr. DICKSON said he was sorry the Minister for Works had muddled the water and clouded the atmosphere by taking as his theme that the Opposition simply wanted to obstruct the passage of the contract, which would be so beneficial to the North. Not a single expression had been used by the Opposition to justify such an inference. On the contrary, they were anxious to give it the most dispassionate consideration, but they wanted the service to be in such a form that it would not benefit the North only, but the colony as a whole. The present position was simply owing to the action of the Government themselves, and the hon. member (Mr. Douglas) had done good service in endeavouring to place the true aspect of the position before the country, and explaining the real points at issue between the Opposition and the Ministry. Those points were few and plain. Before the country was committed to such an undertaking it was only due to Parliament that the financial position of the colony should be submitted, and the ways and means to provide the unavoidable taxation shown. Even if the finances of the colony were

in a perfectly satisfactory condition, and if there was a surplus instead of a deficit, it would only have been proper on the part of the Colonial Treasurer, before asking the House to assent to the contract, to have submitted his financial propositions for the year. It was no inconsiderable contract to which they were asked to pledge themselves. The sum of £55,000 might be swollen to £80,000 annually, and, when they remembered that the revenue of the colony was less than £1,600,000 per annum, they ought to be very careful before adding to their expenditure one-twentieth part of their annual revenue. There was at present a deficit of over £240,000, and at the end of the last financial year there were outstanding liabilities to an extent, even heavier than in the preceding year, amounting to considerably over £200,000; the actual deficiency on the 30th June last being, therefore, £450,000. In addition to that, there would have to be provided £80,000 for interest on the loan, £55,000 for the mail service, and £3,000 remission of harbour and light dues, making a total of nearly £600,000. And yet, in the face of that unprecedented aspect of financial embarrassment the country was asked to commit itself unhesitatingly to a contract of that sort! No private individual would be justified in adding to his liabilities at a time when he could not see how to pay his way. He did not meet this question in a party spirit, but they had to deplore the fact that during the past two years the revenue had been totally inadequate to meet the expenditure. He could not understand why the Government should be so obstinate in persisting in their present position: they must be aware that by so doing they had turned supporters into opponents. Look at the columns of the metropolitan press—they were unanimous in condemning the mail contract in its present form. A modification of the contract in the time clause was an actual necessity before it could be passed. If that were done he should be prepared to sanction it as an experimental measure for a moderate period. Had the Government endeavoured to ascertain the views of the contractors on that point? The Premier introduced an amendment in the contract the other evening, but it was not carried on account of its want of intelligibility. What they wanted to know was whether the Colonial Treasurer was prepared to accept any time modification. He presumed that he had consulted with the contractors about the limitation of the time to eight years, and if the contract was passed ultimately it would have to be modified, and such modification could only be done by consultation with the contractors. Therefore, it was not only desirable that the state of the finances should be entered into and explained to the House, and that the contractors should be consulted, but that the consideration of it should be postponed. Such a course would not be attended with any danger to its improved form. One reason why it was necessary that it should be ratified within three months of the date of the original memorandum was, that if it were not the North might lose the benefit of a service for a month or so. Possibly that might be the case. But if it were so he did not admit that it was a justifiable apprehension. He was convinced that even the warmest advocates of the measure in the North would approve of such a temporary interruption rather than that the country should be committed to a one-sided agreement, and one which would certainly be found to be behind the times when the period of its effluxion arrived. The Minister for Works had attempted to show that they looked upon the question in rather a local light. He was convinced that the northern districts, having now had time to judge for themselves, would view the matter in the same light as they did. A remarkable circum-

stance had come under his notice. He observed in *Hansard* that a passage of arms had occurred between the member for North Brisbane and the Premier, last night, concerning some telegrams from Charters Towers, in which it was recommended that a public meeting should be called to support the Government in the matter of the mail contract, and pointing out that there should be demonstrations made on account of its being too favourable to the South. He would read them another telegram received by him, and when he read it he rubbed his eyes and hardly believed what he saw. It was sent to him by a person who informed him that it was a copy of a telegram to the Mayor of Cooktown, and it was identical in its terms with that which had been read by the hon. member to the House on the previous evening, addressed to the Mayor of Charters Towers. To his mind this evidently showed that there had been some organisation, originating in Brisbane with some person or persons unknown, to get up demonstrations in the northern ports in favour of the contract, when, as a matter of fact, there was not a copy of the contract in either of the places at the time, and the receivers of the telegrams could not have been aware of its nature. These meetings were intended to indicate that there was a strong feeling in the North in favour of the contract. He maintained these public meetings only went to show that they were convened at the request of some person or persons who suggested that there was a violent opposition here. He mentioned this matter with the view of showing what reliance was to be placed on the telegrams, or any meetings in favour of the contract in the north. He was convinced that the good sense of the people in the north would, after perusal, lead them to see that, while it was desirable to have a steam service to their ports, they would be willing to forego a month or two with a view to having a more equitable contract rather than be rushed into this one. If the Government persisted in their present position, which was to force upon the country the contract in its present form, while they could inquire into the willingness of the contractors to accept modifications, it would be unreasonable.

Attention called to the state of the House. Quorum formed.

Mr. DICKSON asserted that, however hon. gentlemen might be disposed to view the subject, it was a matter of the greatest importance and ought to meet with more serious attention than it had. He was sorry to see it made a party question, and that some hon. members of that House had sunk their right to independent criticism. Hon. members should regard not only their financial position, but also the question of taxation. There would be a day of retribution, for undoubtedly the system of taxation would be so heavy that some other resources than those they had at present would have to be looked to in order to provide for it, and that increase of taxation would fall heavily upon some classes in this colony. The Minister for Works endeavoured to show that the Opposition had committed great abuses in introducing a whole bunch of railways. Now he had recognised the necessity for branch lines. How many railways had he in his portfolio to distribute to members who would at once own allegiance to his Government? The hon. member maintained a wise reticence upon that subject; but, judging from the extraordinary manner in which one railway had been developed this session, he had fair ground for supposing that there were others to come, if members of districts who at present opposed the Government would only allow themselves to support the big proposals which the Government delighted in. It had been said that liberalism was only another name for

extravagance; but he would ask what extravagance had ever been entered into by the Liberal Government compared with the losses of the country accruing under the present Administration? What losses could be brought into consideration with the heavy loss just ensued to the colony through the manner in which the contract for steel rails was arranged? The present Government, in fact, stood pre-eminent against all previous Administrations, not only for extravagance, but for incompetent administration, entailing a direct loss to the colony. It was highly desirable that they should know with whom they were entering into a contract. Was it the British-India Company, or was it only to be a proprietary, composed of some members of the British-India Company and others, in the nature of a new company, to be formed as soon as this contract was entered into? It was the very essence of the contract that the country should know with whom they were negotiating. It was idle for the Government to consider that they would carry through this measure in its present crude shape. The Government treated the Opposition as children—as though they had no right to criticise the measures which were submitted. He wondered they recognised the necessity of an Opposition at all. There had been no precedent for such action. Any Administration which had previously sat on the Treasury benches—all Liberal Administrations—had not failed to acknowledge their obligations to a good Opposition. The hon. Colonial Secretary had previously said that a good Opposition was a necessity.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Yes; a good one.

Mr. DICKSON said that was such an Opposition as at present existed—an Opposition which was actuated by one motive only, and that was to try to modify the Government measures so that they might be a credit to the country. If the Colonial Secretary would only view their criticisms in that light, and if the Government would put themselves in communication with the contractors and endeavour to obtain from them substantial modifications on the agreement, which he had no doubt could be accomplished within a week or ten days, all opposition to the contract would be withdrawn. If this were done, and the Financial Statement delivered before the amended agreement was submitted, the Opposition would have no reasonable grounds for continuing the perfectly legitimate stand they had taken. It was a stand which the Government would recognise as perfectly substantial and perfectly parliamentary, and it was the duty of the Government to meet them in the manner he (Mr. Dickson) had indicated, by obtaining from the contractors their assent to a modification of the proposals. Having so done the Government would place themselves in a correct position with the country.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he rose to make a few remarks in reply to what had been said by the Minister for Works in criticising the remarks of his hon. friend, Mr. Griffith. There was no one who could more easily leave the country than the hon. gentleman (Mr. Griffith). He (Mr. Douglas) doubted very much whether the hon. gentleman was at all anxious to leave the country. No doubt he might find a wider field elsewhere than here for his great capacity; but he certainly had given no intimation that he intended to leave the country, and he hoped that these current reports to which the Minister for Works was so fond of giving an increased currency would not be believed by hon. members.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS called the hon. gentleman to order; he was imputing untruths to him by speaking of current reports to which he gave increased currency. He (Mr.

Macrossan) gave no increased currency to the reports, and the hon. gentleman (Mr. Griffith) had himself set them going.

Mr. GRIFFITH said that what he had said two or three times was that he had made up his mind to remain in the colony, and he would do so.

Mr. DOUGLAS said that was a sample of the Minister for Works' current reports. They could trace them to their origin, and the nearest approach they could get seemed to be the hon. gentleman himself. Yesterday he brought up some other current reports or rumours that had been circulating.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: They are quite true, and if the hon. gentleman will ask for a select committee I will prove them.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he was not going to ask for a select committee for any such absurd object. Were they to appoint select committees for every gossiping rumour set afloat? Whenever the Minister for Works heard any more of these current reports he hoped he would take his authority for their contradiction.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: The reports about the hon. member for Toowoomba?

Mr. DOUGLAS said it had been even reported that he was savage and malicious against the hon. member for Toowoomba. He had his political quarrels with that hon. member, but they had never been disguised. They had confronted each other in the House on political matters. He thought it was necessary to do so, being of opinion that the hon. member had gone astray. The course which he had taken with regard to the hon. member was one which a politician was entitled to take.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: You went into his antecedents.

Mr. DOUGLAS: I have never done so, and I will not submit to be contradicted.

The SPEAKER: The hon. Minister for Works is bound to accept the denial.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The hon. member even threatened in this House to do so.

Mr. DOUGLAS: I did not.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I can say that he did so, both inside and outside the House.

The SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister for Lands is out of order in not accepting the denial.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he had had his quarrels with the hon. member for Toowoomba chiefly upon matters of land legislation, and regarding his (Mr. Douglas') policy in connection with the auction system. Their quarrels had been confined to these matters. He had even had some official correspondence with the hon. member, which he did not consider satisfactory, imputations having been made by him against the administration of the Lands Office. His contention with the hon. member had simply and solely been upon political matters, and had not been founded upon the action which the hon. member saw fit to take, and was at perfect liberty to take. He would therefore repeat the hope that the Minister for Works would restrain his tendency to give increased currency to these current reports, which had no foundation in fact. The hon. gentleman had better leave him a little more alone. He did not want to tackle him, and he should not submit to be tackled by him in the way that he usually did. He was a little alarmed at the view the hon. gentleman took of the events which had unfortunately been brought about by the conduct of the Ministry themselves. The hon. gentleman seemed to think that they would

have to be very careful that there was not a decision by the sword—that if these matters were not decided in the House, there must be an appeal to physical force. One kind of physical force was already being employed by the Government in their resistance to the demand that the House should have the Financial Statement before the mail contract was ratified. There was compulsion in the form in which the ratification of the contract was sought, and it did not provide the guarantees they would receive and were entitled to have by the passing of a Bill. They had not the ordinary guarantees which were secured by the Bill of Rights, and which were that no tax should be imposed without the assent of Parliament. They were falling back upon the fundamental principles of the functions of Parliament, and said there should be no additional taxation without the consent of the representatives of the people. It must not be forgotten that by the mode of procedure the Government were employing the rights of Parliament were being evaded, and when he spoke of Parliament he meant not only the Assembly but the other House also. Whatever might be the rights of the Assembly as the representatives of the people in regard to the initiation of money Bills, there was no doubt that the other House had the right to express its opinion upon such eventualities as those disclosed in the resolution. There was justification, therefore, for the position the Opposition were taking up—a justification which he had never known before in any stand of a similar kind. The last determined stand asked for representation. The people at that time were insufficiently represented, and a demand was made, and was ultimately successful, that the business of the country should be impeded until due representation was given. In fact, they were in the position now of redressors of grievances, which grievances were that they were about to be saddled with a tremendous weight of additional taxation in order to give effect to the contract. They were asked to validate the contract first, and to take their chance of finding the taxes afterwards. But they demanded as a matter of right that they were entitled to see how they could secure their taxes before this was done. The Minister for Lands had stated that the Opposition always prevented what was for the benefit of Brisbane. This contract might be for the interest of Brisbane and the whole colony; but before they ratified it they wished to know how the money was to be raised. How would the hon. gentleman like to have a tax of sixpence per gallon on all beer that he brewed imposed in order to meet the liabilities of the contract? It was quite possible that such a tax might be included in ways and means for next year, and that they might have a tax on newspaper advertisements. These taxes had been imposed before now, and might be again. They might have a heavy property tax also. However desirable it might be to have the proposed service, it was clear to him, at any rate, that they should know how they were going to pay for it, because it was quite possible that many would prefer to do without the service to having to bear additional taxation. They had also been charged with having secured the passage of several railways in which they did not believe by "bunching" them with others. He would not admit that they had done anything of the sort, but their scheme was, at any rate, more moderate than the one the present Government had indulged in. Like the Jewish king who had oppressed the people more than his father, the present Government had been more oppressive than their predecessors. If their predecessors had brought in a bunch of six railways, they had saddled the country with a still heavier bunch of railways—

railways which were not discussed separately, but were swallowed holus-bolus.

The SPEAKER said that it being 1 o'clock, the sitting had terminated in pursuance of the Sessional Orders, and the House stood adjourned until Tuesday next.