

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

WEDNESDAY, 5 OCTOBER 1881

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Wednesday, 5 October, 1881.

Railway from Warwick to Killarney.—Additional Sitting Day.—Petition.—Gulland's and Thomas' Branch Lines of Railway.—Tramway to Petrie's Bight.—United Municipalities Bill—third reading.—Police Jurisdiction Extension Bill—recommittal.—Local Government Act Amendment Bill—committee.

The PRESIDENT took the chair at 4 o'clock.

RAILWAY FROM WARWICK TO KILLARNEY.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL (Hon. B. D. Morehead) laid on the table the Fourth Progress Report of the Committee on Railway Extension, referring to the Branch Line from Warwick to Killarney.

ADDITIONAL SITTING DAY.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL, in moving the resolution standing in his name, said he might state that he had been led to frame it as he had done because he thought that Friday forenoon would suit hon. gentlemen better than any other day. Hon. members would agree that they should get on a little more expeditiously than they had been doing lately in order to keep pace with what was being done in another place. By sitting in the forenoon of Friday, members living at a distance from town could get home on that evening; but if they sat on Friday evening it would prevent their getting away until Saturday morning—and again, if they sat on Monday it would compel them in many cases to remain in town during the whole of the week. It was for these reasons that he had been induced to frame the resolution in the way he had done. He, therefore, begged to move—

That, in addition to the days already provided by Sessional Orders, this House will, unless otherwise

ordered, meet for the despatch of business at 10 a.m. on Friday in each week; such sitting to terminate at 1 p.m.

He might mention as an additional reason for agreeing to this motion, that if a message came up from the other Chamber, and they were sitting on Friday afternoon, they would be unable to proceed with it. It made their sitting similar to that of the other Chamber.

Question put—

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he had been waiting for his hon. friend Mr. Murray-Prior—who he noticed was generally the defender of the proper practices and right privileges of that House—to take some exception to this motion. Since it seemed to have tacitly received that hon. gentleman's sanction, he (Mr. Walsh) hardly knew what to do. It seemed to him very curious that, at the very time the Government were proposing to take into their consideration one of the most important measures of the session—the making of the railway from Warwick to Killarney—they postponed its consideration until next Tuesday, at the very same time that they were by this motion proposing to add to the labours of that House by making Friday a sitting day. It did seem strange to him that these two things should be so concurrent—that the hon. gentleman (Mr. Gregory) should get up and move the postponement of the consideration of this railway until next Tuesday, and the hon. Postmaster-General should get up immediately afterwards and move the acceleration of the business of the Chamber. What were they to understand from it? What was it the Government hoped to do? They expected to get the whole of their business through on Friday next, and then the motion of the Hon. Mr. Gregory, which was a portion of the Government scheme, was not to be brought before them until the session was defunct.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: Read the report.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he had not read the report, and he would not read it, as he was satisfied he would be disgusted enough with the evidence taken without reading the report. Here they had one member of the Government—for he looked upon the hon. gentleman (Mr. Gregory) as being elevated to that important position in the conduct of business in that Chamber—postponing this important Government business—for it was part of the Government policy; and immediately afterwards, the hon. Postmaster-General proposing that this important business should be nullified and put out of court, as it were. There was nothing so detrimental to sound legislation and to the dignity of that House, as the introduction of these amendments for interfering with the ordinary sessional arrangements for their business. It originated in its enormity at the time the Hon. Mr. Buzacott was Postmaster-General, and he was evidently directing that part of the business of that House now. But he warned hon. members, and they would see it probably some day when he should not be there to warn them, that there was nothing more dangerous than this practice which they had got into, at the instigation of the Ministry of the day, of carrying on their business in an unparliamentary way so as to bring the session to a close by proposing such motions as these. Their duty was not to agree with that motion. The session had not been too long at all; but he would warn hon. members that the recess would be too long for the good of the country. Here they passed measures they did not understand, and the Government wished to hurry over the business; and in the hope that certain hon. members wanted to get away, to attend to

their private business, they brought forward these motions for interfering with the ordinary decent conduct of the business of that Chamber. In doing so they were sealing their own doom and striking in another nail in their own coffins, because they were justifying the Government in the conviction that that House was simply a recording institution for the purpose of recording the wishes of the Government and the wishes of another branch of the Legislature. He protested against these interventions, which were totally opposed to good parliamentary practice, and were never—except under the gravest necessities—sanctioned in more mature countries where parliamentary government prevailed, and especially in Great Britain.

The Hon. T. L. MURRAY-PRIOR said that, in answer to his hon. friend Mr. Walsh, he might state that the Hon. Mr. Gregory had delayed the consideration of his motion from to-morrow until Tuesday next at this (Mr. Murray-Prior's) request. He mentioned *sotto voce* that they had not read the evidence, and he should like to read it; and it was on that account that the motion had been postponed.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH: You know that Tuesday is to be the last day of the session.

The Hon. T. L. MURRAY-PRIOR said that he had no idea that Tuesday was to be the last day of the session. With regard to their meeting on Friday, if the hon. gentleman would look back he would see that towards the close of a session they were in the habit of meeting on Fridays—not perhaps on Friday mornings, but in the afternoon. For himself, he had no objection to their meeting on Friday mornings, and he therefore took no notice of the motion. He lived a long way from Brisbane, and he might or might not stop in town on that day; but he could assure the hon. gentleman that, at all events during the time he had been in the House, he thought they had always met on Fridays at the end of a session.

Question put and passed.

PETITION.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH presented a petition from John Eastwood, of Ipswich, coal-mine proprietor, against certain legislation affecting his interests.

Petition read and received.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL contended that the petition was altogether out of order. The hon. member presented a petition against a private Bill of which the House was not yet seized. They might know from the newspapers that Gulland's Tramway Bill was being discussed in the other House, but by no other means. The 79th Standing Order said:—

“Provided always that such petition be presented to the House before the third day on which the House shall sit after the day such Bill has been brought by message from the Legislative Assembly.”

The petition which had been read was about a matter of which they knew nothing, and which had no existence so far as that House was concerned.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH asked what was the question before the House. It had been decided that the petition should be read, and it had been read; surely the hon. gentleman did not want the House now to decide that it should not be read. If the hon. gentleman was going into that argument, he (Mr. Walsh) thought he should be prepared to meet him. There was no question before the House.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the statements of the hon. member were, to a certain extent, true; but he would say—and he did not

use the words offensively—that the Hon. Mr. Walsh had certainly misled the House in the presentation of the petition, as he never informed them that he presented—

The Hon. W. H. WALSH: What is the question before the House?

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said if necessary he would move the adjournment of the House. He would point out to the hon. gentleman that he never indicated to the House, as he thought he was in duty bound to do, what were the contents of the petition and what it dealt with. He told them it was presented by Mr. Eastwood, and that it concluded with the usual prayer, and moved that it be received. Now he (the Postmaster-General) maintained that it had been improperly received, and that could be rescinded. It was perfectly clear, from the 79th Standing Order, that it had been improperly received, and he was sure that if hon. members had received any intimation of the nature of its contents, as was usual in either branch of the Legislature, it would never have been received. The 79th Standing Order distinctly stated that the petition must be presented to the House before the third day on which the House should sit after the day such Bill had been brought by message from the Legislative Assembly. The petition, as a matter of fact, dealt with a Bill under discussion in the Legislative Assembly, and whether it would pass or not he did not know; but it was clear that the petition had been improperly received according to the 79th Standing Order.

The PRESIDENT: I must remind the hon. member that it is no point of order to remind this House that a petition has been improperly received.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL withdrew his motion.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he would move to-morrow that the petition be printed, and they could discuss it then.

GULLAND'S AND THOMAS' BRANCH LINES OF RAILWAY.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL moved—

That the Plans, Sections, and Book of Reference of the following lines, viz.:—Gulland's Branch Lines of Railway; Thomas' Branch Line of Railway, as received by message from the Legislative Assembly on the 28th September, be referred to a Select Committee, in pursuance of the Standing Order of 2nd October, 1879.

That such Committee consist of the following members, viz.:—Mr. Foote, Mr. Lambert, Mr. Mein, Mr. Macpherson, and the mover.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he was really amazed at the motion put by the hon. member. It was not five minutes ago certainly that he informed them that a petition was audaciously introduced into the House—improperly introduced—connected with a matter of which they had no cognisance as being *sub judice* in another Chamber. Now, the hon. gentleman within two minutes afterwards got up and moved a most important motion in connection with the very same subject. What were they to understand by that? He had just been informed that he (Mr. Walsh) was wrong—that this was not the same Bill; but the hon. the Postmaster-General had spoken of the matter so vaguely that he had misled him, and he (Mr. Walsh) now saw no objection to the motion, providing the report was not brought up before the following Tuesday, in deference to the feelings of the Hon. Mr. Gregory. He admitted that he had for a moment confounded the two, and thought that his hon. friend had committed a great error.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he thought a more abject apology was due to him

from the hon. member than the one which had been given. However, if the hon. member would in the future be more careful, he would be able to find out which were Gulland's tramways and which were railways.

Motion put and passed.

TRAMWAY TO PETRIE'S BIGHT.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL moved—

1. That the Plan, Section, and Book of Reference of the Tramway from Terminus to Petrie's Bight, as received by message from the Legislative Assembly on the 28th September, be referred to a Select Committee, in pursuance of the Standing Order of 2nd October, 1870.

2. That such Committee consist of the following members:—Mr. Turner, Mr. Gregory, Mr. Macpherson, Mr. Lambert, and the mover.

The HON. W. H. WALSH said he would move, as an amendment, that the names of the Hon. Mr. Buzacott and the Hon. Mr. Mein be added to the Committee. It seemed rather invidious to leave out the name of Mr. Mein, but he dared say it was quite unintentional, and he did not see why the Hon. Mr. Buzacott's name should be omitted. If it were necessary, in order that these names might be inserted, that one should be excised, he would move also that the name of the Hon. Mr. Macpherson be omitted.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the reason why the name of the Hon. Mr. Mein was not on the Committee was a very simple one and would be borne out by every member of the Committee. It was that the Hon. Mr. Mein, from his business engagements, had hardly been able to attend the few meetings of the Committees upon which his name had stood. He (the Postmaster-General) would be very happy to have his name on the Committee, if he thought that putting his name upon it would ensure his attendance. He could assure hon. gentlemen that they had had the greatest difficulty with reference to the gentlemen appointed on committees. On several occasions the Hon. Mr. Gregory and himself had waited for three quarters of an hour without being able to get a quorum. The Hon. Mr. Mein was hardly ever able to attend in the forenoon; but as far as the Hon. Mr. Buzacott's name was concerned, he (the Postmaster-General) would be most happy, if the hon. member could spare the time to come, to include his name on the Committee. The gentlemen already moved had, he thought, the confidence of the Chamber, and he certainly would not submit to the excision of any name. As to the Hon. Mr. Macpherson's name, he thought he was one of the most valuable men in the House to sit on the Committee, and he would not consent to the proposition which had been made by the Hon. Mr. Walsh to omit his name.

The HON. C. H. BUZACOTT said he regretted that the Hon. Mr. Walsh had submitted his (Mr. Buzacott's) name as one of the Committee, because business of a private character would prevent him from attending the meetings of the Committee. It was already well known to the House that he had had many invitations to sit on railway committees, but he had as much as he could do to attend the ordinary sittings of the House. He was a regular attender, being present as soon as the House sat, and it was quite as much as he had time for. He hoped the House would allow the names of the Committee to remain as they were moved.

The HON. W. H. WALSH admitted that the arguments of the hon. the Postmaster-General were very cogent as regarded Mr. Mein, as that hon. member seldom attended; but why was not the same argument used at the appointment of the Gulland Railway Committee, and the same reasons given for not including the name of the Hon. Mr. Mein?

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he would give the reason if the hon. member wished to know. He considered the Hon. Mr. Mein as a gentleman more conversant with coal-mines than any other member of the House, and that was the whole and sole reason why he had placed his name on the Committee. If the hon. gentleman thought there was any other reason he wished he would state it. He could assure the House that that was his sole reason. When the Mines Regulation Bill was before the House a few days ago the Hon. Mr. Mein showed that he knew more about coal-mining and matters there anent than any member of the House. If the Hon. Mr. Walsh thought that that hon. gentleman was improperly placed upon the Committee, he should have objected at the proper time, and he (the Postmaster-General) should have given every consideration to the objection. The hon. gentleman could not accuse him, as the representative of the Government, of any improper conduct in the matter.

The PRESIDENT: Is the hon. gentleman making an explanation, because he has already spoken on the question?

The HON. W. H. WALSH said he did not say the Hon. Mr. Mein was improperly placed upon the Committee, but that he was improperly, according to the argument of the hon. gentleman, being kept off another committee.

The PRESIDENT asked did the hon. gentleman withdraw his amendment?

The HON. W. H. WALSH said he simply made a suggestion. He wished to see the Committee as good as possible.

Question put and passed.

UNITED MUNICIPALITIES BILL— THIRD READING.

On the motion of the POSTMASTER GENERAL, this Bill was read a third time, passed, and ordered to be returned to the Legislative Assembly with the usual message.

POLICE JURISDICTION EXTENSION BILL—RECOMMITTAL.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL moved that the Order of the Day for the third reading of this Bill be discharged, and that the Bill be recommitted for the purpose of considering an amendment in clause 6.

Question put and passed, and the House went into Committee accordingly.

The HON. C. H. BUZACOTT said in passing the amendments in this Bill last night he failed to observe that the following words were inserted in clause 6—"provided that in any proceeding under this section." The proviso referred to the foregoing sections, and the amendment he had to move was simply verbal; it did not affect the Bill in any way. He moved that the words "in any proceeding under this section" be omitted.

Amendment agreed to; and clause, as amended, put and passed.

The CHAIRMAN reported the Bill with a further amendment, the report was adopted, and the third reading made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT AMEND- MENT BILL—COMMITTEE.

On the motion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, the House went into Committee to consider this Bill in detail.

Preamble postponed.

On clause 1—"Endowment payable on general rates only"—

The HON. J. TAYLOR said he would like to know whether, under this or any other Act they

had in force, they could charge general rates, as well as water rates, on public buildings, churches, lunatic asylums, and so on.

The HON. C. S. MEIN said, if the hon. member would refer to the Local Government Act, of which this was an amendment, he would see that it provided that those buildings were specially excepted.

Clause put and passed.

On clause 2—"Council may recover rates for water supplied to public buildings; mode of recovering water rates"—

The HON. W. H. WALSH said this was a most important Bill—one affecting the pockets of the people—and, apparently, it was deemed to be passed through the Chamber without any explanation of its necessity or its merits. He refused to be treated as dumb, driven cattle in that Chamber. Here was a Bill of the utmost consequence being moved by a member of the Government, and he had not a word to say for it; and because he (Mr. Walsh) or any other member, who he supposed would be deemed a refractory member, asked for an explanation, he was met in a spirit that he should not be met with. This was an important clause, and he refused to belong to any reflecting body of men unless he got some information with respect to what he was called upon to inflict upon the people. This was only part of the precious Bill which was swallowed by hon. members yesterday. He then said, and he now repeated, that the object of these Bills was to make the Government popular with municipalities. A general election was coming on sooner or later, and he said that the foundation of the necessity for these Bills was to please certain constituencies. If anybody knew that better than he did, it was the Hon. Mr. Taylor. They knew how he had tried to woo a constituency—not with Bills of this kind; if he had, probably he would have succeeded. At any rate, this was a Bill to deprive the people of this colony of their just rights; because, instead of compelling the Corporation of Brisbane to repay the £70,000 or £80,000 advanced in the first instance, it compelled the Government—that was, the people—to pay for water supplied to public buildings. It was neither more nor less than that, and he said it was a downright appeal to the popular passions of this municipality in particular, and of municipalities generally. Why was there no provision made that this £60,000 or £70,000 should be absolutely paid to the country, as well as all the interest which would necessarily accrue on it? That was not provided for, and it had been avoided in another Bill. The other Bill said that this money was to be advanced to Brisbane only on condition that they should pay the interest; and even after that Bill had passed the people of Brisbane had never paid the interest on that money. As he said last night, they induced the Government of the day—a strictly Brisbane Government which the present one appeared now to aim to be—to set off the interest that was justly due on that second loan against the charges made by the Waterworks Board for water rates on public buildings. This Bill was to further propitiate the people of Brisbane, by absolving them from paying any interest on the loans granted them for waterworks, and to give them another opportunity of charging the rates against public buildings. He said last night, and would repeat it again, that it was never intended when that loan was granted that public buildings—that was, the people generally—should be charged for the supply of water. They got that loan, not with any idea they were going to extract a large revenue from the public buildings of the country. They had gone on gradually, since the time Mr. Hemmant was Colonial Treasurer, getting Governments to put a set-off

claim for water supply to public buildings, and the people of the colony would lose all control over the large advance made to the Brisbane Waterworks; and it would end in the Government of the day being called upon to pay a great deal more for the use of water for public buildings than the amount of interest on their loans. There was no necessity for this clause; the people of Brisbane had not asked for it. The result of this would be that 999 out of every 1,000 people in the colony would be called upon, for the sake of making the Government of the day popular in Brisbane, to pay the piper. There was nothing whatever to justify their passing this 2nd clause. It was a matter of so much importance that he considered this Bill should be referred to a select committee—even to a joint committee of the two Houses. It was a question of very great moment indeed, and he considered he would be justified—even though it brought him into displeasure—in resisting it in every way he possibly could, in order to protect the people of the colony generally in what appeared to him to be a downright fraud upon them. He could not call it anything else. These waterworks had now cost the people of the country about £100,000, and they had not got one farthing of the money back.

The HON. G. EDMONDSTONE said he was surprised that his hon. friend (Mr. Walsh), who was generally so well informed upon every matter he took in hand, should know so little about this subject. The fact was that the Waterworks of Brisbane owed very little to the Government. The Premier of the colony had proposed a plan by which the interest and the loan might be gradually worked off. This proposal had been carried into effect; a large sum of money had been paid off, and the rest was being paid off, and would be entirely cleared within a few years; so that the hon. gentleman was totally wrong as to the facts of this case. Notwithstanding his endeavours to show the House that the city of Brisbane was indebted for this money to this or any other Government, he (Mr. Edmondstone) could tell him that it was a gross mistake. The loan had been largely repaid, was in course of repayment, and would, in a very short time, be finally wiped out.

The HON. F. T. GREGORY was also surprised that the Hon. Mr. Walsh—who took so much pains to investigate all matters that came before them—had not taken a little more pains than he had in this case, and have come to a clear and just apprehension of the meaning of this measure. With regard to charging rates on all classes of public buildings, the object was one which had been very completely tried in Government departments already, in connection with postages. In the earlier days of the postage system it was customary to frank all letters on the Public Service, and all the public departments franked their correspondence. It was, however, found from this that the Postal Department did not get due credit for the services they performed, and it was deemed necessary that each branch of the Public Service should pay for the stamps it used, in order that a correct estimate might be obtained of the services rendered and the cost of conducting the different departments. This Bill was intended to work in the same direction. Each class of public buildings would have to pay a *pro rata* rate, and the Waterworks Board would then be in a position to clearly represent what their actual services were. They would be able to see what was the *quid pro quo* given for the money originally required in the construction of the waterworks. He thought it was far better that the different branches of the Public Service should be required to pay a reasonable *pro rata* amount of water rates. If this clause necessitated an additional

amount of money and loss in the collection of rates, by making the work more complicated, there would be a valid objection to it; but it did not, but rather simplified it. If the hon. gentleman would look at the matter in that light he would not persist in his objection. The Hon. Mr. Walsh had again referred to the Brisbane Waterworks, but he omitted to point out certain matters in connection with it. The works were originally intended to be for the Corporation of Brisbane; but when they were finished it was found more advisable to put them in charge of an irresponsible board to undertake the carrying out of the waterworks system. This was probably done because the gentlemen who at that time composed the municipal council were probably unfitted to take charge of these works, and it was thought advisable to hand them over to a board of gentlemen capable of carrying out the work. This board took the matter in hand, and collected rates, and the rates were, by Executive minute, to be paid into the general revenue; that was after deducting the cost of maintenance and the general working expenses. The result was, however, that so much was found necessary for constructing the dam and laying down the mains to the city that the whole proceeds from rates were absorbed in the cost of extensions and of forming reservoirs throughout the city, which were absolutely necessary to utilise the water when it arrived in town. This was how the money which was intended as payment of the original loan was involved in the extension of this national undertaking, in order to render it more and more remunerative. The consequence was, as the hon. gentleman had already aptly shown, that it became a still further loan, because all the money that should have gone to the payment of the interest and the original loan was sunk again in the shape of additional expenditure on the waterworks.

The Hon. W. PETTIGREW said a statement had been made by the Hon. Mr. Gregory to the effect that the waterworks were taken over from the city of Brisbane in those days because the members of the Municipal Council of Brisbane at that time were not capable men, or might not be so capable as those who might be appointed on the Commission. He challenged that statement at once. He had challenged it at the time, and he would do so again. He would ask who were the members of the Council at that time? The present Chairman of the Board of Waterworks was one; the late Mr. Stephens was another; his hon. friend Mr. Edmondstone was another; Mr. Jeays was another; and he was one himself. He thought they had as much knowledge, and were just as capable as any men that had ever been on that Board of Waterworks. He said at the time that it was a most unjustifiable proceeding to take these works out of the hands of the Corporation of Brisbane, and hand them over to the Board to do as they saw fit; but, at the same time, he had always opposed the Corporation taking them back again, and would continue to do so. So far as this Bill was concerned, he did not like this clause, for reasons other than those which had already been mentioned. They were asked under this clause to consent to rates on buildings used for public purposes. There was no very great objection to that, but in the next sub-clause, B, he noticed that "any place or building used exclusively for public worship" was also included, and he did object to that. He could not see what business they had to touch such places at all. What quantity of water would be used in a church? Places for educational purposes were also included, and the whole of the parents of the children attending them would have to pay their rates regularly, in addition to paying for whatever

water was used at the schools. He thought that was going beyond what there was any necessity for. Mechanics' institutes and schools of art came much under the same heading, as those who frequented such places would pay for the water at their own houses. He noticed that cemeteries, above all places in the world, were also included in this sub-clause. Why they should pay a tax on cemeteries beat him, and he could not understand it. He thought the whole of that clause should be struck out. There was no doubt that such places as hospitals and asylums used a considerable quantity of water, and he would not object to them so much as to sub-clause B. He considered that the whole clause should be struck out, and, failing that, he decidedly objected to allowing sub-clause B to remain in the Bill.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the first part of the clause was quite clear:—

"It shall be lawful for the council of any municipality, etc., to demand and recover payment of rates."

Then it went on to say at the end:—

"By-laws shall be duly made and passed and approved by the Governor in Council regulating the scale or principle of assessing or calculating the amount thereof, and such scale or principle may be different in respect of different kinds of buildings affected thereby."

The Hon. G. EDMONDSTONE said the Bill empowered the corporation or body "charged with the maintenance and control of any waterworks, to demand and recover payment of rates for water supplied." There was the authority to make the by-law, and they were authorised in full in the 2nd clause, where it said:—

"By-laws shall be duly made and passed and approved by the Governor in Council regulating the scale or principle of assessing or calculating the amount thereof, and such scale or principle may be different in respect of different kinds of buildings affected thereby."

These by-laws, of course, would regulate what rate should be charged to "any place or building used exclusively as a hospital, asylum for the insane, benevolent asylum, or orphanage." Of course, if excessive charges were made, the Governor in Council would not approve of the scale of charges that was laid down. But all buildings should pay for the use of the water, and must be compelled to pay; and if they disagreed with the particular rate, they could demand a meter, and the water would be charged to them at what were termed meter rates.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR said it appeared that the Hon. Mr. Walsh was attacking the Waterworks Corporation of Brisbane, which was defended by the Hon. Mr. Buzacott and others; but he could not see what the argument had to do with the question. If Brisbane had robbed the country of so much money, why did they not pay it back? The Hon. Mr. Pettigrew stated that all the water used by a church was one glass, but he would ask if water was never used to wash places of worship? He did not know what sect the hon. member belonged to, but if they did not use water to wash their church out it must be very dirty. Where water was used it ought to be paid for. There was a great deal of fuss about this Bill, which he considered an admirable one. It stated that no rates could be recovered unless the by-laws were duly passed and sanctioned by the Governor in Council. Could there be anything fairer than that? The Governor would take care that there was no overcharge under the by-laws. It was a very just provision, and he wished all their rates were levied on the same basis, so that chapels, churches, and other buildings might be taxed in the same manner for water supply. He had to pay water rates for some of his houses merely because the water mains were laid past them.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH moved as an amendment that the words in the 14th and 15th lines—"Any place or building used exclusively as a hospital, asylum for the insane, benevolent asylum, or orphanage," be omitted.

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE drew attention to something which he thought required consideration. If hon. gentlemen would look at the 21st line they would see that the intention of the Bill was to deal with buildings, and buildings only, and it would thus be seen that the word "place" had been inserted in error. If the word "building" was alone retained, they would understand that it was the intention to give powers to local authorities to deal with taxation, from which they were exempted by the Local Government Act. Throughout the whole of the waterworks statutes the principle appeared to be that the local authority dealing with assessment for waterworks carried certain pipes along certain streets or places, and after the pipes were laid the authorities were to insert a notice in the paper calling upon all owners of buildings to pay a price fixed upon by the by-laws approved by the Governor in Council; and, whether the water was laid on or not, those owners were liable to pay, though if the land was unoccupied there was no tax. To make the matter clearer, and to prevent litigation which might arise from a misapprehension of the clauses, he would point out that, to make the Act read properly, the words "any place" wherever they occurred throughout the Bill should be omitted, and the power to tax be confined to buildings, and buildings only. It would be most unjust, if he happened to be the owner of a piece of land, and the municipality vested with the control of the waterworks carried a pipe through the road alongside his land, that he should be compelled to pay under the by-laws which might be passed under the Act. If the word "place" were omitted, the Act would require no interpretation. It would be most unfair if he, as the owner of unoccupied land, were to be taxed for the construction of works from which he could not possibly derive any benefit. Therefore, either the word "place" should be omitted wherever it occurred, or else it should be inserted in the latter paragraph, so as to make it read—

"And such scale or principle may be different in respect of different kinds of places or buildings affected thereby."

He also agreed with the Hon. Mr. Walsh that it was undesirable to tax buildings used for public worship and educational purposes. In the latter case it would simply be re-taxing the Government, because almost all these buildings were the property of the Government; and the same remarks would apply to cemeteries. They were supported by certain funds given for the purpose by the Government, and in some cases there was great difficulty in making both ends meet. The same remarks applied to almost all that kind of property, such as hospitals, asylums, and orphanages. In Rockhampton he supposed they had one of the best managed institutions to be found in any portion of the colony. It was supported by Government stipend, and was managed by a board of trustees appointed by the Government; and to tax the building would be to tax the Government, which he was sure was not the intention of the statute. While he was desirous of passing this Bill, he was also desirous of amending it in such a manner that it might become a useful statute, and one capable of being clearly interpreted.

The Hon. C. H. BUZACOTT said he would strongly advise the Committee to leave the clause as it stood. As soon as the new system was inaugurated, those buildings had no more claim on the various local authorities for water to be

supplied to them free of charge than a private individual had. This was the month in which the whole of the money spent on waterworks bore interest, and the Government made no concession whatever to the local authorities. If the requirements of the Act were not complied with, the Government made a small annual profit on every £1,000 they lent for waterworks, and so received more than they paid; so that the Government had not the slightest claim to have their institutions supplied with water free of charge. His experience had been that there had been no disposition shown to exact hard or harsh terms from public institutions; in fact, the tendency was all the other way, and if the Bill was passed in its present form he was sure that no public institution would have cause to complain that it had been overcharged. They knew that those institutions might not use water within the building, but in many cases they had gardens laid out in an ornamental manner, with a number of plants, trees, and shrubs, which required a considerable quantity of water; so that if water was not used inside the buildings it might be required on the premises. He was quite certain that this was one of those Bills that the representative Chamber would resent any interference with. They would not object to any alteration facilitating its working, but if they tampered with the taxation to be levied under it it might be depended upon that the amendment would not be accepted.

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE wished to point out that if the hospital, for instance, at Rockhampton desired water to be laid on application would have to be made to the corporation, and that if they applied to the corporation they would have to pay the corporation. But this Bill was a compulsory Bill, and, as he took it, payment under its provisions would have to be made by an institution if the water pipes were only laid in front of it. At the present time, the hospital at Rockhampton paid, he believed, about £40 a year, together with the expenses of laying the water a distance of some eighth of a mile. The Rockhampton Orphanage, within the past twelve months, did the same thing, and they had to pay in the same ratio. But under the Bill it would be a different thing. If the water was conducted in front of a church or not very far off, or near a cemetery, the trustees were bound to pay whether they liked it or not. As a matter of fact, at the cemetery in Rockhampton the water caught by the tanks was quite sufficient for all purposes; and there were many small churches that were not in a position to contribute this taxation, but yet they were bound to pay whether they liked it or not. If the main passed any public institution, such as an hospital, or a church, it was bound to pay *volens volens*.

The Hon. C. S. MEIN said that, under this Bill, public institutions would not be bound to pay if the main merely passed in front of the buildings. They were simply to pay for the water supplied to them. He did not think any interpretation of the word "supplied" could be held to mean water passing a building in an underground pipe.

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE said he mentioned the matter because he thought it was not the correct interpretation.

The Hon. C. S. MEIN said he thought the clause was quite clear—that public buildings were not to pay for what they did not absolutely get. With regard to the other matter raised by his hon. friend, he thought it also had no foundation in fact. The hon. gentleman argued that if he possessed an unoccupied piece of land he would be responsible for the rates under this Bill;

but the Bill did nothing of the kind. He did not see how that land could be held to be—

"Any place or building in the use or occupation of the Crown, or of any person or corporation, and used for public purposes;

"Any place or building used exclusively for public worship, or for public worship and educational purposes, or for mechanics' institutes, schools of art, public schools, libraries, or cemeteries; and

"Any place or building used exclusively as a hospital, asylum for the insane, benevolent asylum, or orphanage."

These were the only buildings that came under the operation of the Bill. It did not affect private persons in the slightest degree. With regard to the Hon. Mr. Walsh's long tirade respecting the Brisbane Waterworks, that hon. gentleman appeared to have forgotten altogether the Act passed last year with regard to loans to public bodies, which said that every public institution in the colony that had had any money given to it from the public Treasury, should repay that money with interest extending over varying terms of years; and the Brisbane Waterworks had to repay the whole of the money advanced to it, amounting in aggregate to £95,000 in twenty-one years, with interest added at a rate greater than the public now paid for the money they borrowed. He thought it only right that public institutions that used water should pay for what they got. He considered the Bill an admirable one.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR said he differed from the Hon. Mr. Mein with regard to these buildings. He did not see why public buildings should be treated any differently from private buildings. At present, if the main passed—as it did—several of his houses, although he did not get a pint of water for them, yet he had to pay the rates exactly the same as if he used as much as he wanted; and he did not see why public buildings should not be treated in the same manner. With regard to the rates these buildings should have to pay, the question was, what rate would the corporation fix under their by-laws? He maintained that if they fixed a certain rate under their by-laws, and those by-laws were confirmed by the Governor in Council, they would have to pay the rates fixed. He contended that the clause was not nearly so clear as the Hon. Mr. Mein tried to make out. It was very indefinite indeed, and he was glad that the discussion had taken place, so that those who were interested in waterworks would be able to understand it when the Act came into operation.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said the Hon. Mr. Mein's explanation with reference to the Bill passed last year simply amounted to this: that, having passed a Bill calling upon the Corporation of Brisbane to pay interest on all the money borrowed, it now seemed necessary, in order to appease the anger of the people of Brisbane, that the Government should introduce a Bill to enable them to find the means of paying that interest—that was, to make charges that had never been allowed before. He deplored the want of sympathy that seemed to exist amongst hon. members on the subject which he had introduced in his amendment. He now called upon hon. members to vindicate their position as men of feeling and as Christians, and to assert that our charitable institutions should not be taxed for the supply of water given to them. If that was not a feasible and right proposition to make in that Chamber he did not know what could be. If it were a proposition to reduce the rents of the pastoral tenants of the Crown, he would see a phalanx of members rise up with the utmost warmth to show the necessity for it; but when he called upon hon. members to endeavour to ameliorate the condition of charitable institutions that were already overbur-

dened—when he asked them to say that the State should supply gratis a sufficiency of water to these institutions—he noticed an extraordinary amount of apathy on the part of hon. gentlemen, and a kind of ridicule of his proposition. He said it would be ungenerous of them—that they would be losing any respect they ever had in the estimation of the people of the country—if they consented to pass any Bill that dealt with public property in the shape of water, so as to be made a tax upon charitable institutions which found it difficult enough to collect sufficient funds to enable them to carry on their operations. He said it was their bounden duty to extend, at any rate, their sympathy to those institutions, and to say that the State was bound to supply them with a copious supply of water. The result would probably be this: Take, for instance, the Brisbane Hospital or any kindred institution: it would be taxed so heavily for the use of the water that the supply would have to be limited, and the probability would be that where there should be a copious supply of water there would be a niggardly supply. He contended that it was their bounden duty to provide that wherever those charitable institutions existed they should not be taxed for the supply of water, especially when that water supply was the property of the Government. If it belonged solely to the municipality, even then it would be a question with him whether he would submit to have the municipality charging public institutions of a charitable nature for it; but when that property belonged to the Government—to the people of the country—he said it was mean and despicable that they should attempt to inflict upon these charitable institutions such a tax as this. It was all very well for his hon. friend to say that by-laws would be made, and the charges might be low; but if they could be made low, they could also be made large according to the natures of those individuals who had the framing of those by-laws, and of the Government, which had the approval or disapproval of them so that it might be made more coercive or less coercive on the institutions in question. He should push his amendment to a division.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the interpretation given by the Hon. Mr. Mein with reference to the meaning of the word "supply" was, of course, absolutely correct. It simply meant the water that was supplied—not that the main merely passed the place. With regard to the objection of the Hon. Mr. Melbourne as to the use of the word "place," he thought he would be able to point out that it was necessary that that word should exist in each one of the subsections. "Place" might mean public gardens, or reserve, neither of which could be called buildings. Even a locomotive, which took in water at a hydrant, could hardly be called a building; nor could public wharves come under that heading. Therefore, the word "place" very necessarily occurred in those subsections. He merely pointed this out to show the hon. gentleman that the expression had not slipped in inadvertently.

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE quoted from the Rockhampton Waterworks Act to show that he was right in his argument. Under that Act, if the wharves in Rockhampton or Brisbane wanted to connect with the main, they were bound to pay, whether this statute were passed or not. They had no power to connect with the mains unless by permission of the municipal council or other local authority; and if they did connect they had to pay this assessment; therefore, as the 2nd clause now stood, it only left the law in the same position as it was at present. However, after the remarks of the Post-

master-General, he would not say any more on the subject. He did not intend to oppose the Bill.

Question—That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the Bill—put, and the Committee divided :—

CONTENTS, 14.

The Hon. B. D. Morehead, T. L. Murray-Prior, L. Hope, F. T. Gregory, W. D. Box, F. H. Hart, J. Taylor, J. Swan, C. H. Buzacott, W. Graham, C. S. Mein, G. Edmondstone, W. F. Lambert, and P. Macpherson.

NON-CONTENTS, 2.

The Hon. W. H. Walsh and W. Pettigrew.

The Committee being in division,

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he formally questioned the vote of the Hon. Mr. Edmondstone, he being a member of the Board of Waterworks, and hence officially interested in this question.

The CHAIRMAN thereupon asked the Hon. Mr. Edmondstone if he had any personal interest in this vote?

The Hon. G. EDMONDSTONE: None whatever.

The question was then resolved in the affirmative.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH asked what was the meaning of "general rates"?

The Hon. C. S. MEIN: It is defined in the Local Government Act of 1878.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he would not do the Hon. Mr. Mein the injustice to suppose that he was a member of the Government, although he was allowed to be their exponent. He thought before they agreed to a thing they should know the meaning of it.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the hon. gentleman could easily find it by looking at the Local Government Act of 1878, with which he was well acquainted.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he always supposed that an hon. gentleman in charge of a Bill, and especially a Government Bill, should give replies to all reasonable questions. He (Mr. Walsh) did not know the meaning of the words; if he did he would not have asked the question.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the 187th section of the Local Government Act provided :—

"The council of every municipality shall once at least in every year, and may from time to time as they see fit, in manner hereinafter mentioned, make and levy rates, to be called 'general rates,' equally upon all ratable property within the municipal district. And no such rates made in any one year shall exceed the amount of one shilling in the pound of the annual value of such property as estimated under the provisions of this Act, or be less than sixpence in the pound of such value."

He trusted that that would now burn into the memory of the Hon. Mr. Walsh.

The Hon. W. H. WALSH thought the Postmaster-General should give information of this kind, which they were perfectly justified in asking, without making any satirical remarks. He (Mr. Walsh) had a right to ask the question. He did not know the meaning of the words; and he believed the hon. gentleman had not the slightest idea of their meaning, although he had quoted the section so glibly.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 3—"Short title"—and the preamble, put and passed.

On the motion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, the Chairman left the chair, and reported the Bill without amendment; the report was adopted, and the third reading made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

FIRE BRIGADES BILL—COMMITTEE.

On the motion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, the President left the chair, and the House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider this Bill.

The preamble was postponed.

Clause 1—"Repeal of the Fire Brigades Act of 1876"—put and passed.

On clause 2—"Interpretation"—

The Hon. W. D. BOX asked, was it wise that in this clause the interpretation of a fire insurance company should be—

"Any joint stock company or other association, carrying on the business of insuring property against loss or damage by fire in any town."

An insurance company did a great deal more than was stated in that clause.

The Hon. POSTMASTER-GENERAL explained that this was only the interpretation of an insurance company as applied to this Fire Brigades Bill.

Clauses 3 to 8, inclusive, put and passed.

On clause 9—"Powers of assistant superintendents"—

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE would draw the attention of the hon. Postmaster-General to the fact that the powers conferred upon the assistant superintendents under this clause were the same as those conferred upon the superintendents in the previous clause.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL pointed out that these powers were only given in the case of the absence of the superintendent.

Clause 9 put and passed.

Clauses 10 and 11—providing for fire brigades attending fires outside of town boundaries, and the penalty for obstructing members of a fire brigade—put and passed.

On clause 12—"Returns to be furnished by fire insurance companies"—

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he would point out to the Committee a matter which appeared to have been overlooked by the Postmaster-General. This clause required the insurance companies to furnish certain returns according to the schedule. But if they looked at the schedule they would see that it said :—

"I, the undersigned, do solemnly and sincerely declare that the above return is a true statement of the amount insured by the said company, within the town of —."

But it was quite possible that the property insured might be outside the town.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL pointed out that this Bill was intended to apply to municipalities and their suburbs.

Clause 12 put and passed.

On clause 13—"Constitution of fire brigade boards"—

The Hon. W. D. BOX said he would like to know from the hon. Postmaster-General whether it was intended by this clause that an insurance company having £11,000 insured should be entitled to two votes. He found that the clause stated :—

"And two other members shall be elected annually in the month of March by the fire insurance companies carrying on business in the town, and for the purposes of such election such fire insurance companies shall have one vote for every ten thousand pounds, or portion of ten thousand pounds insured, as shown in the return herebefore required to be furnished by each insurance company."

What he wanted to know was, would a company having £11,000 insured be entitled under this clause to two votes?

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he took it that that would be the interpretation of the clause. If the hon. gentleman, however, thought it better to make it £5,000 instead of £10,000, he should have no objection to such an amendment.

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE said he would like to ask the hon. Postmaster-General what would be done if the insurance companies neglected to appoint a member to the board.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the hon. gentleman would find that clause 14 would provide for such an emergency.

Clause 13 put and passed.

Clause 14—"Constitution of boards under other circumstances"—put and passed.

On clause 15—"Fire brigade plant to be vested in board"—

The Hon. W. H. WALSH said he considered this a very harsh clause. He would just show hon. gentlemen what might happen under this clause. In the case of an entirely volunteer brigade, and with which the corporation had nothing whatever to do, if there happened to be some disagreement amongst themselves, the board, under this clause, were empowered to take possession of the property—of the private property of the brigade.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said the hon. gentleman seemed to misapprehend this clause. All the fire-engines and machinery and plant generally would be virtually paid for by the contributions from the different bodies by whom the board was appointed, and it was therefore only right that the plant should be vested in the board.

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE pointed out, if any hon. member desired to move an amendment to the clause, that at Rockhampton the whole of the fire brigade plant had been purchased by the Municipal Council.

Clause 15 put and passed.

Clause 16—"Superintendent to furnish board with periodical reports as to condition of brigade and plant"—put and passed.

On clause 17—Providing for a fund for the maintenance of fire brigades, and for contributions from the Municipal Council, from the Government, and from the insurance companies—

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE said, before this clause was passed, he would ask the hon. Postmaster-General whether he did not consider the minimum limit of 4 per cent. was too high. Perhaps many hon. members were more conversant with the working of fire brigades than he was; but he might state that he had seen the superintendent of the fire brigade at Rockhampton upon this question, and though that gentleman considered this Bill a very good one, he was of opinion that the minimum limit fixed here was too high. He found the clause said:—

"For the purpose of raising a fund for the support and maintenance of the fire brigade in any town, the municipal council thereof shall annually in the month of March pay to the fire brigade board such sum as they may deem necessary, not being less than four per cent. nor more than eight per cent. on the total amount of 'general rates' received by such council during the year last past, as shown by the detailed account which they are required to furnish to the Colonial Treasurer, in support of their claim to the annual endowment provided for in the Local Government Act of 1878."

The minimum appeared to him to be very high, and if levied on the general rates at Rockhampton, which amounted to £10,000 a year, would amount to £400. He would ask the Postmaster-General whether it would not be advisable to leave out the minimum and fix the maximum.

"Not less than 4 per cent." appeared to be rather hard on the taxpayers.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR said, small as the minimum appeared to be, they could not afford to pay that 4 per cent. on the whole rates. He did not see, in fact, why the Municipal Council should pay a farthing towards the fund. He would move, as an amendment, that on the 16th line the word "four" be expunged, and the word "two" inserted, and that in the next line the word "four" be substituted for "eight." He thought it was a very great hardship that the Municipal Council should be called upon to pay those amounts. According to the percentages of the Bill, Rockhampton would have to pay £400, and this, in his opinion, would be a great deal too much.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he would point out to the Committee that he had before him a table made out for the Colonial Secretary, showing the amounts derivable from municipalities under the 4 per cent. assessment for the year 1880:—

"It appeared that Allora would have to pay £9 6s. 5d. Bowen, £10; Blackall, £5 5s. 7d.; Brisbane, £504 17s. 7d.; Charters Towers, £35 7s. 2d.; Clermont, £7 9s. 7d.; Cooktown, £23 10s. 5d.; Dalby, £15 1s. 7d.; Gayndah, £4 17s. 7d.; Gladstone, £22 4s. 10d.; Gympie, £22 4s.; Ipswich, £53 13s. 7d.; Mackay, £35 4s. 10d.; Maryborough, £96 8s.; Middle Ridge, £3 16s. 10d.; Rockhampton, £105 16s. 10d.; Roma, £19 18s. 5d.; Sandgate, £4 9s. 7d.; Toowoomba, £90 12s.; Townsville, £44 7s. 2d.; and Warwick, £51 6s. 5d. The amount contributed in Brisbane in 1877 for the fire brigade by the insurance companies was £276 11s. 3d."

The assessment that would be required from Brisbane, he admitted, seemed rather high, as it would amount to £500 or £600; but at the same time he believed that the fire-brigade system in Brisbane required considerably developing. As a matter of fact, it was known that if a fire started in South Brisbane, the place where it originated was burned down before the fire brigade could get to it; and he believed the same was the case when a fire broke out at the other end of the town—Fortitude Valley. He believed three establishments would be required to be kept up at Brisbane to keep the place tolerably safe from disaster by fire. He admitted that the amount of £500, which would be required from Brisbane, was rather startling, and he might be prepared to go so far as to accept the amendment, so far as the minimum was concerned, but as to the maximum being interfered with he certainly would not accept any proposition of that kind. There was no intention, he might say, on the part of the Legislature or the Government in any way to over-tax the municipalities in the country or the insurance companies. Their sole object in the Bill was to try to make it effective in providing for the stoppage of fires. He would accept the proposed 2 per cent. as a minimum, but he could not accept the 4 per cent. as a maximum.

The Hon. W. D. BOX said that when the Bill was read a second time, he gave hon. members notice that when the 17th clause came under discussion he would endeavour to obtain the consent of the House to some alteration of it. He quite agreed with the Postmaster-General that the 4 per cent. contribution seemed to press rather hard on the citizens of Brisbane, and other towns of growing importance in the colony; but they must remember, also, that the city itself was largely increasing, and, of course, the risk of fires would be decreased instead of increased, as the risk of fire existed more largely in small towns. He did not know whether he was in order with his amendment, but he wished it to take precedence of that of the Hon. Mr. Taylor; and it ought, in his opinion, to be considered before the amendment of the hon. member. He thought the reduction from 4 to 2

per cent. was a good one. Figures were stubborn things which they could not get over, and they could not be altered by the speech of the hon. the Postmaster-General. They would all allow that the revenues of the city of Brisbane were increasing year by year, and if the Bill became law the contributions of the Municipal Council would be yearly increasing. The Municipal Council would contribute towards the Fire Brigade, under this Bill, £500 a year; the Government would contribute £500; and the insurance companies would contribute a similar amount, which would make the total £1,500; and the amount would increase every year in proportion to the increase in the municipal revenue. The Fire Brigade last year was carried on at a cost of about £500. All were mortal, and if they had £1,500 placed in their hands, they would find a means of spending it somehow or another; and, as he had intimated on the second reading of the Bill, it might be spent the first year in increasing a large portion of the plant. But year by year the necessity for doing so would cease to exist to such an extent that, instead of buying plant, the contributions would very likely be spent judiciously. If the Bill were passed as it was printed all the contributors would be asked to pay more than was necessary; therefore, he hoped the House would reduce the amount of contributions to the minimum of 2 per cent., allowing the maximum to remain as it was. He did not think the Municipal Council would ask for more money than they wanted.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said if the Hon. Mr. Taylor would look at the last portion of the 17th clause he would find a proviso stating—

"That the amount to be paid or contributed by the Colonial Treasurer or the insurance companies shall not, without the consent of the Governor in Council, be greater than a sum equal to four per cent. of the amount of such general rate.

The Hon. W. D. BOX said if more money were asked for than could be spent the Municipal Council would not get it.

The Hon. J. TAYLOR said he had not so much faith in these bodies as the Hon. Mr. Box had. He (Mr. Taylor) maintained they would get the utmost penny out of the ratepayers; and he would deal with them so that they would not be able to get more than a certain amount.

The Hon. W. PETTIGREW said he had been of the same opinion as the Hon. Mr. Taylor; but, after hearing the explanation of the hon. the Postmaster-General, he was perfectly satisfied with the suggestion that 2 per cent. should be the minimum. Where risks were greater, the insurance was greater; and as to the municipality asking for too much, there would be double the number against them, as the municipality would contribute two members, and both the insurance companies and the Government would contribute two members each. Surely, with a board composed like that, they would not be inclined to be extravagant. At least the insurance companies would not, and he thought that the Government might be trusted in that respect. The municipalities themselves would not be inclined to increase the rates; he himself would be inclined rather to reduce them, and he hoped to be able to reduce them before many days were over. He thought the minimum should be reduced to 2 per cent.

Question—That the word "four," proposed to be omitted, stand part of the Bill—put and negatived. The word "two," proposed to be inserted, was so inserted.

Clause, as amended, put and passed.

Clauses 18 and 19 put and passed.

On clause 20—"Power of board to make regulations for payment of allowances to members of fire brigades"—

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE said he questioned the advisability of inserting subsection D, which provided for—

"The payment of gratuities or annuities to the widows of members of fire brigades who may lose their lives in the discharge of their duties as such members."

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said these sums would be paid out of a fund, and the board would, no doubt, be very conservative in any action they took with respect to this provision. It would lie with themselves, and it was hardly necessary for the House or the Government to interfere with them.

The Hon. W. D. BOX said the board might be carried away by their feeling for a man who had done some valiant deed in the saving of life.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said that might happen, but he certainly did not think it would happen more than once. It would be a lesson to them for the future if they made a mistake of that kind.

The Hon. C. S. D. MELBOURNE said he was speaking for himself when he said that one's opposition was disarmed by sympathy with the person on whose behalf the pension was asked. One felt either inclined to vote in its favour, or to abstain from voting at all. Whether it was advisable to trust a board of this kind to grant annuities which would bind subsequent boards was a question; but if the Postmaster-General was satisfied, he (Mr. Melbourne) did not object.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he agreed to a certain extent with the Hon. Mr. Melbourne, but he must remember that the position of a member of Parliament dealing with money that did not belong to him, and the position of those who were themselves beneficially interested in the funds which were at their disposal was very different. Perhaps if he or the hon. member were in that position, they would be more anxious than if they were dealing with the money of the public.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 21—"Short title"—the schedule, and preamble put and passed.

On motion of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL, the Chairman reported the Bill with an amendment; the report was adopted, and the third reading was made an Order of the Day for to-morrow.

The House adjourned at 8 o'clock until the usual hour to-morrow.