

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

WEDNESDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 1901

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

WEDNESDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER, 1901.

The PRESIDENT took the chair at half-past 3 o'clock.

PAPERS.

The following papers, laid on the table, were ordered to be printed:—

- (1) Vital Statistics, 1900—forty-first annual report of the Registrar-General.
- (2) Report of the Official Trustee in Insolvency, Brisbane, for 1900.

TREASURY BILLS BILL.

THIRD READING,

On the motion of the SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. J. Murray), this Bill was read a third time, passed, and ordered to be returned to the Legislative Assembly by message in the usual form.

MINING ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

COMMITTEE.

Clauses 1 and 2 put and passed.

On clause 3—"Amendment of 62 Vic. No. 24, s. 28"—

HON. F. I. POWER said that in several parts of the remaining clauses of the Bill he had some very important amendments to submit. One was that not only should the miner who seeks to mine on land taken up for tramway purposes pay for improvements, but should also deposit the estimated cost of any deviation of the tramway. At present the tramway itself, which included the embankment and the per-

manent way, was absolutely excluded, both from the ordinary prospecting miner as well as the owner of the lease. That might be amended by allowing the miner to go on with the greatest freedom, so long as he compensates the owner, both for the improvements and the deviation. But in order that those amendments should have fair consideration, he would suggest that the further consideration of the Bill be postponed until next week. He might also add that he had a very important amendment to move in subsection 7 of clause 7, and another to enable tramways to be taken across freeholds. A provision of the latter nature might not be of importance in some districts, but it would be of great importance in others. In his own district there were lands now freehold which were originally mineral selections, and if any tramways were constructed in that district they must of necessity go through those freeholds. If the Committee were willing to adjourn the debate until Tuesday, he would undertake to have his proposed amendments printed and circulated amongst members before they met again.

HON. B. D. MOREHEAD said his own impression was that a measure of the sort before them ought to be referred to a select committee. The subject of it was one of which very few hon. members had any very minute knowledge, and a searching investigation by a select committee would show them the best way of dealing with it. He threw out the suggestion to the Government as one well worthy of consideration.

HON. A. H. BARLOW said that when the Bill was placed in his hands he wrestled with it for some little time; and hon. members would hardly believe that all that verbiage was for one single purpose—to emancipate tramways from labour conditions. He hailed with satisfaction the comments which the Hon. Mr. Power had made upon it, and hoped they would have the advantage of his skill and ability in dealing with it.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION said he had no objection, if other hon. members had none, to the adjournment. Indeed, it would be rather an advantage to adjourn the further consideration of the Bill until Tuesday, when the Hon. Mr. Power's proposed amendments would be in the hands of hon. members. With regard to the suggestion of the Hon. Mr. Morehead, he preferred, under the circumstances, a Committee of the Whole House to a select committee. They would have all the necessary information before them, and would be quite competent to deal with any question that might arise. He moved that the Chairman leave the chair, report progress, and ask leave to sit again.

Question put and passed.

The House resumed. The CHAIRMAN reported progress, and leave was given to the Committee to sit again on Tuesday next.

AGRICULTURAL LANDS PURCHASE ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: In moving the second reading of this Bill, I may say that hon. gentlemen are already familiar with its provisions, as they are almost exactly similar to the provisions of the Bill which was presented to the Council last year. Amendments were made in that Bill here which were objected to in the Assembly, and consequently the Bill did not become law. The provision that the Council objected to last year does not appear in this Bill. That was,

that all proposals for the purchase of estates should be submitted to Parliament for ratification. That does not appear in this Bill, which gives the Governor in Council the right to purchase direct, up to the extent of £100,000 per annum, as provided in the original Act; but in the event of any estate being offered to the Government in excess of that amount, then it is proposed that those estates shall be scheduled and submitted to Parliament for approval. I need hardly point out that the operations of the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act have been attended with very great success. The Act has been largely conducive to a much closer settlement on some of our best agricultural lands than hitherto existed. In all, the Government have repurchased about 138,000 acres of land, and that has all been taken up, with very few exceptions, by small settlers, with the result that our farming population has been increased, and agricultural production has correspondingly increased, to the very great benefit of the country. The Hon. Mr. Barlow was the Secretary for Lands who put the original Bill through Parliament. At that time I was not very favourably disposed to the principle, believing that the same object could be effected if the matter was left in the hands of private individuals. However, the results of the measure have gone to dissuade me from that view, and I feel satisfied that this extension of the principle will still further tend to promote close settlement. One of the principal amendments proposed to be made by the Bill is in the definition of what constitutes "agricultural land." Hitherto the Land Court was bound down by the definition, and they considered they were not warranted in recommending the purchase of any estate which embraced anything but agricultural land. The definition of "agricultural land" proposed by the Bill is to include dairying land as well. I have always looked upon dairying as a very important branch of the farming industry, and estates on which agricultural and dairying could be worked in conjunction might with profit be purchased by the Government. The Bill provides that at least one-fourth of every estate that is purchased shall consist of first-class agricultural land. In substitution for submitting all proposals to Parliament, the Bill proposes that the full Land Court, consisting of three members, shall report upon every estate that is submitted to the Government. The report of the Land Court must have their three signatures attached before an offer can be entertained. I look upon that as a sufficient safeguard, in addition to the inspection that will be made by the local land commissioner, and I think an expert is always sent by the Department of Agriculture to make a report. That should be a sufficient guarantee to Parliament that every proposal is worth considering and acting upon. Unless a proposal bears the signatures of the three members of the Land Court it cannot be entertained. Clause 3 provides that every offer of an estate shall be accompanied by a plan of the estate, and the expense of a feature survey must be borne by the vendor. It is considered fair that the vendor should give the Government all the information he possibly can with regard to the character of the country he proposes to sell, and a full description of it. There are very few other alterations, except those that I have alluded to, from the Bill of last year. One feature of the Bill is that applicants who are prepared to pledge themselves to personally reside on their land shall be given priority of purchase over those who intend to reside by bailiff. That is a very desirable provision. The Bill has been very carefully considered in the Assembly, and was fully discussed here last session, so that very little more can be said upon it. I beg to move that the Bill be now read a second time.

HON. A. GIBSON: As stated by the Secretary for Public Instruction, we had the Bill before us last year which did not receive the approval of this House. I must confess that on that occasion I could not see my way to support the measure, by reason of Ministers wishing to saddle Parliament with the responsibility of all purchases under the Act. I think it is the duty of the Government to undertake the responsibility for all purchases under the Act, which they consider advisable to make in the public interests, considering that they have the reports of a number of gentlemen who have examined the land. I must express my pleasure at the alteration which has been made in the Bill this year by the inclusion of dairy lands. It is very pleasing to note in the reports that we get that dairy farming is becoming very popular in this State. At the present time we are making about £250,000 per annum from butter, and the fact that we now propose to open up lands for dairying, with the view of putting permanent settlers upon them, will benefit many industries in our colony. It will give more work to our railways; it will bring more business to our commercial institutions; and it will bring about the closer settle-

ment that is so much needed in our [4 p.m.] sparsely populated State. My wish is that in the selecting of this land the gentlemen who are sent to inspect will take care that the grasses growing upon it are carefully examined with a view to seeing that the pastures are suitable for cattle, and that the elements of cultivation are such that persons taking up the land will be able to do a sufficient amount of cultivation to supplement the natural grasses by growing products which the cattle require. If this is carried out, as I hope it will be, the measure now before us is worthy of the favourable consideration of the Council. In this tropical country of ours men do not care to work over-hard in the heat of the day, and if we can give them a little more land and can get in a better class of cattle, and if we can make living easier for the people who settle upon these lands, the House will be doing a service to the country and will be advancing the cause of agriculture within the colony. There are one or two points that might be considered, and I shall just draw attention to one here. Subsection 4 of clause 7 provides that the persons who become home-sealers under this Bill shall not be allowed to do certain things, one of which is that they shall not be allowed to mortgage their holdings. I think that after they have made certain payments to the Crown they ought to be in a position to borrow money if they happen to be in a fix. Persons who take up land under this Act, like those who take up land under other Acts, require financial assistance, and they should not be debarred from obtaining that assistance. If we deprive them of this right to borrow at a fair rate, we shall simply drive them off the land, and that is not the intention of the Bill. The object of the Bill is to encourage closer settlement, and enable men to work more harmoniously. I have much pleasure in stating that I shall support the Bill now before us.

HON. A. J. THYNNE: I do not think there is much criticism to offer on the Bill as a whole. As the Secretary for Public Instruction has said, we considered this Bill in its main features last session, and I think we should be pleased to see that the views expressed in the Council have been adopted by the other House and by the Government. There is one thing that I should very much like to see introduced into this agricultural land purchase system. There are many places in Queensland that are eminently suited for agriculture, but which are so far removed from railway communication that they are not

sought after for purposes of close settlement. There are many places in Queensland which, if the Government had the opportunity of repurchasing, and they had the right to construct light tramlines to connect those estates with a railway, and to charge the expense of making that connection upon the land, and let the price be fixed so as to include, not only the purchasing price of the land, but also the price of developing the land, I am sure it would give a very much wider selection to the Government in their desire to induce close settlement, while it would not involve any heavy burden upon the new settlers, and would open up portions of the country which at present are closed practically to close settlement. I do not know whether it is too late for the Government to consider this proposition, but the sooner it is thought of the better. There are some estates on the Downs 12 or 15 miles from a railway. That is too far for a farmer to carry his bulky produce; it is too far to carry his milk or his cream day by day, and the country is confined mainly to pastoral purposes. Over that country it would take very little to lay down such a tramline as we see on our sugar plantations, and bring those distant places into immediate touch with a railway line. The cost would be very trifling compared with the value of the property and the area it would open up to close settlement. Not only on the Downs but elsewhere there are often places where the ordinary main roads are in wet weather almost impassable. They want some reliable means of communication, and I am sure it would be a very great help to the working of the Act, and a very great help to settlement, if some such system could be introduced. I understand that the average cost of tramlines such as we see on the sugar plantations in the North runs to £500 or £600 a mile. If the Government had to go 10, 15, or 20 miles, and purchased an estate for £40,000 or £50,000, the cost of a tramline of that description would be a very small item in the total cost, although the tramway would bring the whole district into communication with the outside world. The expense of repayment would be very trifling per acre, while it would work remarkably well if the system were tried. I hope that before long such a system, if not introduced in the present Bill, will be introduced as an additional principle in the working of the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act—that is, that the Government should be able to take upon themselves a portion of the improvement of the property by giving better communication before they actually throw open the land for close settlement.

HON. G. W. GRAY: I would like to refer to subsection 4 of clause 7 in connection with the remarks of the Hon. Mr. Gibson. Of course, the conditions of sale do not appear in this Bill, but in the original Act. Purchasers get twenty years' terms to pay an amount of £3 an acre—sometimes less than £3 per acre—and, consequently, I think the clause should be adhered to. Of course there is no objection to farmers creating a lien on their crops. That is all that is required, and it is done in many cases; but I do not think the Government would listen to a proposal that they should be allowed to mortgage the lands which they have bought from the Government on payments spread over twenty years. As regards the main object of the Bill, I think everyone is aware of the results that have followed from the purchase of estates on the Darling Downs. Until those estates were purchased by the Government, I, for one, never thought that even barley could be grown on the Downs. I am convinced now to the contrary. I made a statement in this House that it was my opinion, based on the opinion of experts, that suitable

barley for malting could not be grown there. Now I have changed that opinion, and am a large buyer from year to year of that grain. As regards wheat, we all see the large strides that have been taken in connection with wheat-growing on the Darling Downs. We have a member of this Council who is largely interested in milling, and I understand he is pretty well keeping three mills going grinding wheat grown on the Darling Downs. Until, as I say, the farmers could buy those freeholds there was no chance of establishing that industry. We had a visit a few days ago from a man-of-war from the Argentine Republic, and I had a conversation with some of its officers on the very question now before us. They told me—and it has been confirmed since by another authority—that they are exporting this year alone from the Argentine Republic no less than 2,000,000 tons of wheat. That republic is only seven years older than ourselves as a self-governing country. They obtained self-government in 1852, and we in 1859. The statement made to me was that it was entirely owing to the fact that in the Argentine Republic the lands have been alienated and converted into freeholds that that gigantic wheat industry has been established. We have a similar set of circumstances here; our land is just as good as theirs; and yet we are not able to export even a ton of wheat. There must be some reason for it, and the reason is that our lands have been locked up; and until farmers can become owners of their land we shall see no progress.

HON. A. H. BARLOW: They have an immense water carriage in Argentina.

HON. G. W. GRAY: They are much nearer their market than we are; still the distance of water carriage is a thing that we need not consider. With the rapidity of communication by steam, and the low rates of freight, we need not consider that at all except in the carriage of live stock. There is no doubt that in the carriage of live stock the Argentine Republic has a great advantage over us in having their market within three weeks of their country, whereas ours is twice the distance; but as regards frozen meat we are just in the same position as they are. Touching upon the question of live stock, the Argentine Republic, although only seven years senior in age to ourselves, possesses 100,000,000 sheep, all depasturing on freehold property. The State does not own any of the land on which those sheep are depastured, and that is another argument in favour of closer settlement on the lines indicated in this Bill. Those engaged in the industry will have a more certain tenure, their stock will be better looked after, and we shall make even more rapid progress than we have done in the past—that is if the Argentine Republic is any criterion, and I think it is. In cattle, again, they have the same proportion in excess of Queensland, and I am told by those gentlemen who visited our port a few days ago that every acre of the land on which they are depastured is freehold property. With regard to the Hon. Mr. Thynne's suggestion as to tramways, the first cost of the light narrow-gauge lines erected by sugar-planters, as far as the railway, does not exceed £300 a mile—that is exclusive of rolling-stock—and they have to-day some 300 or 350 miles of their own tramways. Where there is an opportunity for a trunk line it is constructed on the same gauge through either the divisional board or through the assistance of the Government. There is no reason why those lands on the Darling Downs should not have their light railways—cheap lines on the narrow-gauge system—by a combination amongst the farmers themselves, the Government making a trunk line to connect them through the local governing body. The slow carriage by horse

and dray between the farm and the railway is, or ought to be, a thing of the past; at all events the day is past for it. Those are the two questions raised by the Hon. Mr. Gibson and the Hon. Mr. Thynne. As regards the more serious matter raised by the Hon. Mr. Gibson of mortgaging those lands, I think that should not be considered at all. When a farmer has purchased his land he can create a lien on his crop, which, I think, will be ample for all purposes.

HON. A. H. BARLOW: The object of this non-mortgaging is to prevent dummying during the five years while the conditions of residence are being fulfilled. In clause 8 the word "three" is repealed and the word "six" is inserted. The lands will now have to remain open to anybody for six months before they are open for unconditional selection. Formerly they were open only for three months. When I interrupted my hon. friend I had in my mind the enormous internal water communication possessed by the Argentine Republic. What a position we should be in if we could take a steamer from Brisbane to Thargomindah by water! Yet some of the rivers in South America are navigable for three or four times that distance. The result is that local carriage is nothing whatever. I am afraid that if those great States were governed on a sound and proper political system they would be very serious opponents of ours.

HON. G. W. GRAY: They are already.

Question put and passed.

The committal of the Bill was made an Order of the Day for Tuesday next.

ADJOURNMENT.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION: I move that the Council do now adjourn. The business for Tuesday will be the consideration in committee of the Mining Act Amendment Bill and the Agricultural Lands Purchase Acts Amendment Bill; and afterwards the second reading of the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Bill.

Question put and passed.

The Council adjourned at twenty-five minutes past 4 o'clock.