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BEER & GOFF

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

THE OPPOSITION ASK SOME VERY PERTINENT QUESTIONS.

Amendment to the Assessment Act—Civil Servants may Vote—Other Matters.

MONDAY, April 12.

House met at 3.30. Mr. H. C. Macdonald presented a bill amending and consolidating the Acts referring to the affairs of St. James Church. Referred to the Private Bills Committee.

Mr. Campbell asked the Commissioner of Public Works to table a statement showing in detail all money expended in the Public Works Department without public sale or tender since the 24th April, 1891, up to the 1st April, 1897, the names of all persons receiving money, the nature of the work performed, if such work was performed by days' work, the names of the parties employed on such work, the rate per day paid to each man, the number of days worked by each man respectively.

Hon. Mr. Peters said much of the information asked for had been given from time to time, and all the hon. member desired to know might be obtained from these returns. He would, however, endeavor to furnish such information as was considered necessary to satisfy the hon. member's curiosity.

Mr. Campbell pointed out that this was not the way questions were answered by the late Government. They always gave the fullest information.

Mr. Campbell asked the Commissioner of Public Works to table a statement showing in detail all money paid out of the Public Works Department since the 31st December, 1896, up to the 9th April, 1897, the names of all persons receiving such money, the nature of the work for which such money was paid, and the date such work was contracted for. If paid by supervisor's orders, the date of supervisor's return and the names of supervisors making such returns.

Hon. Mr. Peters promised the information asked for at an early date.

Mr. Campbell asked the Commissioner of Public Works to table the names of all persons tendering for the addition to the Lunatic Asylum at Falconwood, the amount of each tender, with all plans and specifications belonging to said contract and copy of said contract.

Hon. Mr. Peters promised to furnish the information asked for, and would table the original contract. The Government, he might explain, accepted the lowest tender.

Mr. Shaw pointed out that the information he asked for some time ago relative to Crown prosecutions had not been furnished.

Hon. Mr. Peters said the return was ready and would be tabled.

Mr. A. J. McDonald asked the Government to table a statement showing in detail the capital expenditure on the Provincial Building of \$417,611, on Government House \$81,722, on Prince of Wales College \$113,117, on Normal School \$264,299, on Jail, Queen's County, \$222,666.

Hon. Mr. Peters said the statement asked for would be tabled as soon as it was possible to get it ready.

Mr. A. J. McDonald asked the Commissioner of Public Works if it is the intention of the Government to construct a bridge and aboiteau on McLellan's Creek, De-Gros Marsh, and what steps have already been taken towards building them.

Hon. Mr. Peters said the Government had not yet come to any definite conclusion in this matter. The proposed aboiteau would cost a great deal of money.

Mr. Shaw pointed out that the information asked for by him regarding the Smith estate had not yet been tabled.

Hon. Mr. McMillan tabled the statement.

Hon. Mr. Peters tabled the statement with reference to Crown prosecutions asked for by Mr. Shaw.

House went into committee on the resolution providing for the amendment of the Assessment Act.

Mr. Campbell again raised his voice against class legislation. He argued that the burden of taxation did not fall evenly upon all, and claimed that Charlottetown should be taxed on the same principle as other parts of the country, and they should be given back their just share of taxes in order that we should have their powerful influence and support to keep down expenditure and taxation. He claimed that a large proportion of the cost of ferries should be charged to Charlottetown. He showed that many of the country districts did not receive back a just proportion of the taxes they paid in. In the Fourth District of Prince, for instance, the taxes collected amounted to \$3,277.27, while they only received in the shape of roads and bridges, \$1,356.25. In the First District of Queens \$3,064.71 was collected, while only \$2,623.25 was expended. In the Second District of Queen's \$3,089.70 was collected and only \$1,838 expended, and in the Third District \$2,598.77 was collected and \$2,682 expended. The Third District is the constituency of the Leader of the Government. In the First District of King's, represented by the Commissioner of Public Works, \$1,438 was collected and the enormous sum of \$4,468.15 expended. He condemned such unfair treatment in scathing terms, and put in another plea for a more equitable distribution of taxes. He argued that the Act should be amended that the monied men of Charlottetown would be reached.

Hon. Mr. Peters pointed out that the Income Tax and the Assessment Act were entirely distinct, and should be so considered. As to whether the Income Tax should be amended he was not going to say just now. They should keep to the Assessment Act until it was disposed of.

Hon. Mr. Campbell explained that he well knew the difference between the acts and did not need to be told that they were not identical. So far as he (Mr. Campbell) was concerned he was opposed to an in-

come tax. He thought the Leader should re-cast the Assessment Act changing it all after the words "be it enacted."

Hon. Mr. Gordon pointed out that it was only a few years since the people were told that the day of taxation was far off. But it was not far off, as the people have found out. Large sums have been wrung from the people in the shape of taxes, and when the large expenditures it is proposed to make are taken into consideration the indications are that they will be still further taxed. The people found it very hard to pay the taxes at present imposed, and if their burden was to be still further increased he did not see how they could stand it. He put in an eloquent plea for a more equitable distribution of the burdens of the people and for more care in the expenditure of public money.

Mr. Rogers (Alberton) spoke in favor of the proposed change in the Assessment Act, claiming that it would right the inequality which at present existed. He defended his vote on the Assessment Act, claiming that he would not be justified in opposing the whole Act because he did not have his way regarding certain portions of it. He denied that resolutions as to how he should vote on the Assessment Bill had been passed at the Bloomfield meeting. He stated that at that meeting that he was in favor of taxing every man who exercised the franchise. He was also favorable to taxing the towns.

Mr. Blanchard said it was quite true, as stated by his colleague, that no formal resolutions were passed at the Bloomfield meeting. But he (Mr. Rogers) told the meeting that he would not vote for the Act if it did not provide for taxing the towns. He claimed that when his colleague (Mr. Rogers) found that the bill did not provide for taxing the towns he should not have voted for it.

Mr. Shaw pointed out that when they went to the people the Opposition told them that taxation would have to come, and that so far as they were concerned they would make the tax bear as quitably as possible upon all classes. The Government promised the people that there would be no tax. But everyone knows that this promise was not kept, that taxes were imposed and that each succeeding year a deficit was rolled up until now there is a debt amounting to about \$500,000 hanging over the people. He severely arraigned the hon. member for Alberton for voting for the passage of the Assessment Act which did not tax the towns while it taxed the villages.

Mr. Rogers again defended his vote, and a war of words took place between himself and Mr. Shaw in relation to the matter. Messrs. Campbell and Sinclair also took a hand in the argument.

Hon. Mr. Sinclair explained that the object of the change was to cause the burden of taxation to fall more equally. The idea was to re-arrange the Act so as to abolish deficits, and he thought the Opposition should lend their aid.

Mr. Shaw wished to know if it was the intention to still further add to the burden of taxation. Such an inference might be drawn from the remarks of the last speaker.

Hon. Mr. Peters pointed out that the resolution now before the House would be followed by another which would more definitely explain what it is intended to do. The object of the proposed bill is to make the burden of taxation fall more evenly than it is at present.

Mr. Campbell said the hon. member for Springton led the House to believe that the idea was to increase taxation. He thought the House understood the resolution, but the remarks of the hon. member from Springton put a new phase on it.

Messrs. Warburton and Cumiskey spoke in support of the proposed change in the Act, claiming that it was in the interests of the people.

Mr. Bell was speaking when recess was taken at six o'clock.

After recess Mr. Bell continued his remarks. He claimed that inequalities existed under the present arrangement of collecting taxes, and asserted that not only did individuals keep down the valuation of their lands, but whole settlements did likewise. The mode indicated by the Government is powerless to reach the seat of the trouble. The man who under the existing arrangement valued his land at a low rate would not be likely to stultify himself by placing a different valuation upon it under the changed conditions. The only way to get at the true value of land was to have impartial valuers assess it, and not allow the owner to do this work. If he (Mr. Bell) understood the temper of the people he thought that they were dissatisfied with the present system of taxation. They were not only dissatisfied with the Land Tax but they were dissatisfied with the Income Tax. They feel that the monied men of the Province are not contributing their proper share of taxes. If the Government do not touch the Income Tax they might as well leave the Assessment Act alone. Their conduct will not meet with the approval of the people. The increase from the proposed change in the Assessment Act will not be sufficient to fill the large gap which unfortunately exists between revenue and expenditure in this country. However when the bill is brought down the main points will be more fully set forth and an opportunity will be afforded of saying more regarding it.

Hon. Mr. Gordon then moved the following amendment, which was seconded by Mr. Shaw:

Resolved that all after the word "that" in the first line be struck out and the following substituted in lieu thereof:

Whereas, The people were led to believe by the present government at the election of 1893 that the "day of taxation is far off" and that the affairs of this province could be carried on for many years without resorting to direct taxation, and that no taxation would be imposed without first consulting the people thereon; and Whereas, The present government in 1894 in direct violation of their pre-election promises passed "The Assessment Act"

which is unjust and unfair, and bears most unevenly on the various classes and interests in this province; and

Whereas, Notwithstanding the large amount of taxes collected, the debt of the province has been bounding upwards at a most alarming rate and it is believed the government has lost the confidence of the country;

Therefore Resolved, That in the opinion of this House no further powers of taxation should be granted to the government until the people obtain an opportunity of passing judgment on their conduct.

The resolution was discussed by Messrs. Rogers (Alberton) Shaw, Campbell and Bell. The opposition speakers roundly denounced the Government for not keeping their promise to make revenue and expenditure meet, and charged them with deceiving the people with respect to taxation. Mr. Campbell's statement that the resolution represented the feelings of four-fifths of the people of the province evoked applause, and the Leader of the Government threatened to clear the gallery. On a vote being taken on the amendment it was declared lost on the following division:—

Ayes—Gordon, Shaw, Jas. E. M. Donald, Blanchard, Campbell.

Nays—Peters, McMillan, Farquhars, Sinclair, Forbes, McLaughlin, H. C. McDonald, Aitken, B. Rogers, Prowse, B. H. Gallant, Galkin, McKinnon, Cumiskey, Rogers.

A division was then taken on the main motion and it was declared carried.

Hon. Mr. Peters then introduced the following resolution:

Resolved, that the Assessment Act, 1894, be amended so that all land taxable thereunder be taxed at the rate of one-fifth of one per cent on its value, such value to be arrived at by declaration made by the owner thereof, and that such section be introduced into the statute as will provide proper machinery to carry into effect such amendment.

This motion carried, the opposition voting against it and the government and its supporters endorsing it.

The Speaker then took the chair and it was moved that the two resolutions be reported agreed to.

It was moved in amendment by Hon. Mr. Gordon, seconded by Mr. Shaw, that the resolution be referred back to a committee of the whole house for the insertion of the following amendment:

Resolved, That all after the word "that" in the first line be struck out and the following inserted in lieu thereof:

Whereas, The people were led to believe by the present Government at the election of 1893 that the "day of taxation is far off" and that the affairs of this province could be carried on for many years without resorting to direct taxation, and that no taxation would be imposed without first consulting the people thereon; and

Whereas, The present Government in 1894 in direct violation of their pre-election promises passed "The Assessment Act," which is unjust and unfair, as it bears most unevenly on the various classes and interests of this province; and

Whereas, Notwithstanding the large amount of taxes collected, the debt of the province has been bounding upwards at a most alarming rate and it is believed the government has lost the confidence of the country;

Therefore resolved, that in the opinion of this House no further powers of taxation should be granted to the government until the people obtain an opportunity of passing judgment on their conduct.

A division was taken on the amendment and it was declared lost. The five Opposition members supported it, and the Government and its supporters, including Messrs. Wise and Warburton, voted against it.

The original motion that the report of the committee be adopted was then put and carried.

Hon. Mr. Peters introduced an Act amending "The Assessment Act, 1894," which was read a first time and made the order of the day for a second reading to-morrow.

Hon. Mr. Peters presented a bill authorizing the Government to construct a building to be used as a Prince of Wales College and Normal School. The second reading was set down for to-morrow.

Hon. Mr. Peters introduced a bill encouraging the construction of Cold Storage in this Province. The bill was set down for second reading to-morrow.

Mr. McKinnon presented a bill incorporating the Murray River Hall Committee. Set down for second reading to-morrow.

Mr. MacKinnon moved that the House resolve itself into a committee of the whole to take into consideration the following resolution:

Resolved that in view of the Provincial qualification for electors being adopted for Dominion Elections, and in order to have as universal a suffrage as possible on the Dominion Plebiscite vote on prohibition, it is expedient to repeal the Act passed in the 55th year of Her Majesty's reign, chapter 2 intitled "an act to amend an Act passed in the 53rd year of Her present Majesty's reign intitled "an Act respecting the election of members of the Legislature."

He pointed out that the Dominion Government was about repealing the Franchise Act and adopting the Provincial list. His object in moving the resolution was to allow the Civil Servants to vote. He condemned the Dominion Government for abolishing the House of Commons bar, and for giving us the plebiscite.

Mr. Campbell spoke strongly against the hypocrisy of the present Administration on the temperance question. He put in a strong plea for universal suffrage, and expressed his approval of the proposal to alter the civil-servants rights of British freemen.

Hon. Mr. Gordon referred in scathing language to the conduct of the Government in taking from the civil servants their right to vote, and said he was glad to observe that this mark of degradation was about to be removed. He was sorry, however, that he could not give the Government credit for sincerity in this matter.

There was a local election coming on and the vote of every man was needed.

Hon. Mr. Peters pointed out that the reason the right to vote was taken away from the Dominion officials was because they were not allowed to vote as their consciences dictated. The principle adopted by the Liberals was that the man who was competent to vote for member of the Local Legislature was competent to vote for Dominion representatives. There should not be one qualification for Dominion electors and another for Local electors. Every man who is entitled to vote should vote on the plebiscite.

Mr. Shaw expressed his pleasure at the prospect of the civil servants having their rights restored. He pointed out that the Opposition took strong ground against the taking away of the right to vote from the Dominion officials, and he was now glad that this inalienable right was about to be restored. The Opposition claim that every man who has reached the age of 21 has the right to vote, and that when the present Government took away the right to vote from the Civil Service officials to further their own selfish ends they returned to the dark ages.

Mr. H. C. Macdonald spoke in approval of the proposal to restore the right to vote to Dominion officials.

The motion carried unanimously, and Mr. Warburton took the chair in committee. The resolution was reported agreed to in committee, and a bill in accordance therewith was presented and read a first time.

The House adjourned until 4 p. m. on Tuesday.

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