ASSESSMENT ON STOCK ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1862

Legislative Council, 15 August 1862, page 669

Second reading

Mr. BROWNE moved the second reading of the Assessment on Stock Act Amendment Bill. The hon. member was almost inaudible to us in consequence of the hum of conversation going on in the body of the House. We understood him to say that the object of this Act was merely to provide an appeal in certain cases of over-assessment, and also to provide for the discontinuance of the principle of paying in money on an over assessment. In Victoria a similar power was given to the pastoral lessees, and the House would see that it was a desirable measure. He should move the second reading.

The COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS said the Government were prepared to assent to the second reading of the Bill, but there were some matters of detail which they were not prepared to assent to altogether, but which he had no doubt could be amicably settled in Committee. He would ask the hon member not to proceed with the Bill in Committee on that day, but to allow members an opportunity of considering the precise terms on which appeals should be granted. There was no wish on the part of any member of the Government to do otherwise than to carry out the provisions of the Assessment on Stock Act in their integrity, and if it could be shown that that had not been done there would be no objection either to reduce or increase the assessments as might be shown on appeal to be necessary.

Mr. TOWNSEND did not rise to oppose the second reading of the Bill, but to express a hope that the hon member would not go further with the measure on that day. The Bill was then read a second time.

ASSESSMENT ON STOCK ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1862

Legislative Council, 16 October 1862, pages 1079-82

Adjourned debate

The Hon. the CHIEF SECRETARY moved that this be read a second time. The Bill was of an extremely important character and was likely to beneficially influence the occupation of large tracts of country not now occupied. Hon. members were aware that some years ago a bill was passed levying an assessment of 2d. per head on sheep. The provisions of that bill had been carried into operation without any serious consequences in various parts of the colony, but there were other parts where its enforcement was oppressive and would stand in the way of vast tracts of country becoming occupied which otherwise might be made a source of revenue to the colony. The object of the Bill before the House was to divide the waste lands of the Crown into three classes—first, second, and third. The first class would comprise runs that were known to be of good carrying capabilities and where the assessment of 2d. per head upon sheep could be paid without entailing any pecuniary inconveniences upon the owner. The second class would comprise runs that were not of so good a quality as those in the first class. It was proposed that the lessees of this (2nd) class should only pay one-half of the amount of the annual assessment— 1d. per head, and that the payment of such should be postponed for seven years instead of four years as provided by the old Act. The third class would include all lands faraway, the lessees of which would not be liable to pay any annual assessment on stock until Parliament should so direct. Many lessees were unable to pay the present assessment without seriously affecting their financial position, and unless something was done to ameliorate their condition, the result would be that they would have to throw up the country. Thus not only would it be ruinous to the lessee, but it would decrease the revenue. Hon. members were aware that the occupation of country in the Far North was not only attended with great trouble, but generally proved a very unprofitable speculation. If a liberal system was adopted, it would prevent runs now occupied to cease becoming so. He would move the second reading of the Bill.

The Hon. H. AYERS seconded. He considered the measure a liberal one, as it would enable persons profitably to take up large tracts of country now lying waste in the Far North. The Bill was defective in some respects, but whilst in Committee he trusted its defects would be remedied.

The Hon. J. MORPHETT would support the Bill. He admitted that unless inducements were held out by the Government, large tracts of country would never become occupied. It was not at all improbable that even land taken up at the present time would be thrown up unless some liberality was shown towards those who held it. (Hear.) The more country there was occupied, the more the wealth and interest of the colony would increase. He observed by the plan placed before him, that the runs were classified into three parts. He trusted that those parts were drawn out with due regard to their carrying capabilities and position. (Hear.)

The Hon. J. H. BARROW supported the second reading of the Bill. He considered the Bill affirmed a good principle. It was, however, lamentable to think that such an important measure should be introduced at the close of the session, and with only a few hours’ notice. With reference to the map, there was no evidence before them that the divisions of the country had been correctly made. It might be that such was the fact, but there was not the slightest evidence of it. It was easy for a person to sit down with a ruler and pen in his hand and draw out a plan, but the question was whether or not such a plan was a correct one. The Government in the early days of the colony defined main lines of road on paper without considering whether they were on a dead level or passed over moantains and down gullies, but when they came to construct those roads they discovered that these paper plans were a complete absurdity. (Hear, hear.) He was afraid the same remarks would be equally applicable to the plans before them. He perceived that a straight line was drawn across the map, over more than 10 degrees of longitude-(hear, hear)—the country to the north being but down in one class, and that to the south being put down in another. The question was, whether they were, without evidence, to accept that plan as correct. He confessed it would be a miracle ii it turned out that the straight line in question fairly divided two different classes of country according to their pastoral value. (Hear ) He looked upon the divisional line as an arbitrary one. They had no opportunity of proving the correctness of the plan. If time had permitted it he would have referred the Bill to a Select Committee, and have taken some evidence upon it. His wish was to deal liberally with those who were inclined to stock new country; but they were required to pass a Bill in total ignorance ot its bearings. (Hear.) He admitted that it was absurd to suppose that country in the Far North should be considered as valuable as that situated near a shipping port. He would support the second reading of the Bill, but would not hold himself responsible as to the correctness or otherwise of the map, which professed to indicate by colours the relative value of the different runs.

The Hon G. F. ANGAS said that the last speaker had so well embodied his sentiments as to leave him little to say. All maps that came out of the Surveyor-General’s offices must not be taken as correct. (Hear.) He entered his protest against the manner in which Bills of an important character were pushed into that House at the close of a session. It was impossible for hon. members to examine and become acquainted with the provisions of Bilis that they only had in their possession for a few hours. (Hear.) It appeared, however, that they would either have to impugn the Survey-General’s report, or pass the Bill. He considered that it was not right that the Government should come down to that House and say “ you must either agree to our dictum, or reject the Bill.” (Hear.)

The Hon. A, FORSTER thought the censure cast upon the Government for the mode in which the plan before them was prepared was scarcely deserved. He had inspected the plans, and observed that although the line dividing the pink and the purple was drawn in a straight line across the map, that dividing the purple and green was not. It would be observed that the country painted green gradually ran into that coloured purple. In his opinion the person who had prepared the map had some idea of the character of the country dealt with. He agreed that there was country north of Port Augusta which should be exempted from the assessment, as it was at a considerable distance from a shipping place, so as to render it almost worthless. He knew that the country east of that rated in the map as second class, and in the vicinity of the Barrier Ranges, was so destitute of water that it could not be considered second class land. The Surveyor-General he knew to be intimately acquainted with the runs set down on the map as first-class country. He did not object to the mode of division of country adopted in the map before them, as he thought that the Surveyor-General would not have agreed to it, unless he was perfectly satisfied that it was correctly stated. He had come to the conclusion, considering the evidence of the Surveyor-General, that such division of country was not so arbitrary as some hon. members supposed. He did not say that the map was strictly accurate, but he believed from observations he had made, that the person who compiled it knew the nature of the country it classified—(hear)— and that his appropriation was fair and equitable. \*

The Hon. the CHIEF SECRETARY was certainly astonished at some of the remarks that had fallen from hon. members, more especially the Hon. Mr. Angas. That hon. member had stated that the measure had not been introduced by the Government consequent on pressure from outside the House. He admitted such was the case, but the measure was one of relief, viz., to remove a burden that at the present time existed in the opening up of fresh country. The revenue that year from waste lands of the Crown would suffer to the extent of £2,100 by the passing of the Bill, and next year more. (Hear, hear.) As he said before the measure was one of relief, yet the Hon. Mr. Angas said it was of an arbitrary character.

The Hon. Mr. ANGAS wished the Hon. the Chief Secretary to understand that he did not oppose the Bill on account of its provisions, but because he considered the House had not sufficient time to consider it.

The Hon. the CHIEF SECRETARY said it was a measure that had been fully considered by the Government and had been introduced by them (the Government), not even at the suggestion of a single squatter. The Government considered that the assessment on stock should be modified, and accordingly they deaired the Surveyor-General to give effect to their views, and the result was the introduction of that measure. It was one that had emanated from the Surveyor-General, and could not be looked upon other than one of a disinterested character. The Hon. A. Forester had replied so effectually to the arguments of hon. members in reference to the plan before the House, that he (the Chief Secretary) would not make use of any further remarks in that respect. There would be tracts of country found, the carrying capabilities of which were very small, and their distance was so great from a place of shipment, as to render them scarcely worth taking up ; and the object of the Bill was to classify the country according to the carrying capabilities. In the case of runs being assessed too high, the owners could appeal under the “ Assessment of Stock Tribunal Bill.” (Hear.) The hon. gentleman concluded by expressing a hope that the House would pass the second reading of the Bill.

Carried.