**WASTE LANDS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1869**

**House of Assembly, 2 September 1869, pages 206-11**

Second reading.

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. W. Cavenagh**), in moving the second reading of this Bill, said the Act of last session was in fact a compromise, as some parties considered it too liberal and others the reverse. Those who held the former view prophesied that it would have the effect of depreciating the value of land; but such was not the case, for the land sold for cash from March 1 to August 31 was 126,169 acres, which realized £153,928 12s., or an average of *£1* 4s. 5d. per acre—as good an average as had been for years. On credit there had been 12,898 acres sold, realizing nearly 30s. per acre. The amended Land Act had worked, so far, in a very fair manner; and although land-sharking might not be altogether done away with, a person could at the Land Office get a farm of 620 acres without any unfair competition. But it was pointed out that the two clauses which the Government now wished to amend had prevented parties taking advantage of the Act; and as the agricultural areas came into operation next Monday, they thought it wise to propose they should be amended. In the first place, it appeared that four years were not sufficient for the farmer, for if it happened that he missed one crop, he would only have three to clear himself. Another year would give him greater advantage. The percentage paid on the purchase-money for four years was 5 3/5 per cent., and the concession of another year would make it 47/10 per cent, or nearly 5. The second objection was that 5s. was too much to be expended in improving the land the first year. A man who took up waste land the first year generally ploughed as much as he could and got his posts on the ground, and in the second commenced fencing. The allowance that he should be allowed to spend 5s. in improvements in two years would be a great benefit to the farmer, and no loss to the revenue. The other part of the Act simply provided that in agricultural areas of less than 50 square miles in extent it should not be necessary to declare suburban land. He hoped the House would agree with the Bill, and pass the second reading.

Mr. COTTRELL looked upon this attempt to alter the Bill as a mere farce. The idea of offering one year more was absurd, seeing the encouragement given in the other colonies, where they almost gave the land away for nothing. He should be prepared to move in Committee, that at least 10 years’ credit be given. Looking at the facilities given for settlement on the land in the earlier days of the colony, and the effect those facilities had in drawing population, they must make more liberal laws if they were to expect to keep pace with tie other colonies. He believed the addition of this year would be of no use at all, and whilst not opposing the second reading, he should try in Committee to make the Bill more liberal.

Mr. CHERITON agreed with the hon. member that the additional year would be of very little use to agriculturists. The Commissioner of Crown Lands said in former years they could grow three crops, but he must know better. If a man went on waste land, it must be two years before he could expect a crop, and if the seasons were like the two last, and what there was even a prospect of the third being, he should like to know how he could possibly pay his way in four, or even five years. He thought if the House had agreed to his propo­sition of last session that seven years’ credit be given, they should not have been called on to consider this matter now. If they continued patching and patching in this manner, next session the land question would come most prominently before the House. He maintained that it was their duty to make their Act as liberal as, or more liberal than the other colonies. He called attention to this fact —their land system was the dearest of all the colonies, and their produce the cheapest, it being sold for something like Is. per bushel less than in Sydney and Melbourne. Their average yield here was something like nine bushels, and in Victoria about double. If farmers studied their own interests, it would be better for them to go to the other colonies; and he had been told by many that if some material alteration was not made they should do so. He had induced three farmers in his own district to wait and see what would be done this session. This question not only concerned those who wished to take up land, but those who now held farms; because if greater facilities were given to those who had small farms, and were eking out a miserable existence, to go into the unsettled districts, they would sell out to their neighbours, who would then be in a better position. He hoped the House would support him in endeavouring to alter the Bill by providing that seven years’ credit be given, and three years for 5s., to be spent, on improvements.

Mr. BEAN hoped the Bill would be amended in Committee, for it was not liberal enough. He did not see the objection to the subject coming before them next session; he hoped it would be brought forward until they got a good Act. In Victoria, the greatest opponents of the local Act of last session, by which land could be obtained at 2s. per acre for 10 years, were now its greatest supporters, their only objection to it having been that it would give too much power to the head of the depart­ment. But they could not expect that the mere passing of a liberal Land Act would bring them population, if people were not made acquainted with the fact that such an Act was passed. The majority of people did not even know where South Australia was. Some man who knew the colony should go and tell them that it was a good place to come to; and besides, they must pass other liberal measures and a liberal tariff, and let people know they had done so.

Mr. D. FISHER had seen nothing to alter the opinion he held last session in favour of free selection, deferred payments, and bona fide occupation. If they did not pass a liberal Land Act, the action of the other colonies in doing so would force the necessity of doing so upon them against their will. He hoped they should not have further occasion to alter what they now intended to carry out. He did not see the use of continual patching up. The points on which the other colonies had failed gave them an opportunity of avoiding similar defects. He should vote for the most liberal provision which was proposed.

Mr. PEARCE thought this was the first instalment of appeals to the House in endeavoring to perfect a liberal land system. (Hear, hear.) His opinion was if they would only respond to invitations of this kind every year, they should have something to do in this direction. (Hear.) It appeared to him that the Commissioner of Crown Lands had not attempted to show any occasion for this Act. If it was a question of running a race with the other countries in reference to a land system, it was evident they should have to hold out inducements beyond what those countries offered. In the United States, according to Sir Morton Peto, any person could obtain 160 acres of land in the backwoods free of cost on becoming a naturalized subject. In South America, any person who chose to settle on the land could have it almost for nothing; but it did not follow, because the land was taken up in this colony at a different rate than obtained in other parts of the world, that it was less attractive for settlement. In New Zealand people could take up land at 10s. an acre, but what did it cost to clear? (Hear, hear.) In Canada it could be had for a dollar, but it was in dense forests, where the sun never shone and not a blade of grass grew, so that there was a great delay before commencing to cultivate, in waiting to raise fodder for working stock; whilst here the stock could be turned out and obtain sustenance. In Western Australia land could be taken up on more liberal terms than in any of the other colonies, but it had lagged behind all. It was a fallacy to suppose that the present depression in the colony was entirely attributable to a defective land system. (Hear, hear.) He did not see, if it was shown that a small concession, should be granted, that it should be refused. If such a thing obtained in the colony as the hon. member for Mount Barker said did, that no crop could be got off waste land for two years, it was owing to dilatoriness or some unforeseen event. It was certainly the exception, and not the rule.

Mr. BRIGHT felt gratified at the remarks of some hon. members who represented districts near the city. He thought they now felt that unless the agricultural interest was in a flourishing condition the trade of the city was not likely to be so. He thought it was a very great pity to be tinkering with the present Act, for they must pass one much more liberal in its character. The hon. member for East Torrens referred to the liberal land scheme of Western Australia, but as the land there bore no comparison with that of South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales, he did not think there was much analogy in the cases. They should endeavour to keep pace with the other colonies, who were making bids for population; and, as immigration had failed to supply them with it, they must dispose of the land—nearly the only commodity they had—on liberal terms in order to obtain it. The Act of last session he regarded as failure. Certainly the agricultural areas had not yet come into operation; but he thought there should be less time elapse in the depreciation of the value of the land to the upset prices. He should not oppose the second reading of the Bill, because he hoped there would be sufficient energy amongst members representing the country districts to enable them to give greater facilities for settling on the land, or else they should lose the best of their population. The 4th clause provided that during the first year proof should be given to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the purchaser was bona fide occupying his land. He thought the House should decide what bond fide occupation was, and not leave it quite so much to regulations, as under the Act of last session; for one Commissioner might consider it meant one thing, and another something totally different.

Mr. EVERARD was not surprised at the introduction of the Bill, because he said the Bill passed last session could be taken as an instalment of what they should be called on to do. If the provision that credit should be extended to five years was inserted because the agriculturist might have a bad year, he thought it might be extended to seven years, and let the “ bunnified” settler—as he believed he was generally called outside—decide when he had had four good years. (A laugh.) It was very refreshing to hear non. members talking about being liberal, particularly those who were quite outraged the other day at the idea of putting a tax upon land. He should like to know who was to pay the taxes if they were to be so liberal in giving away the Crown lands of the colony, which were held as security lor a large amount which they had borrowed, and were paying interest on. As the land was compared with that of Canada, he did not see the objection to coming nearer home. In Western Australia the fee-simple of land could be obtained at 2s. 6d. per acre. (Mr. Glyde— “Sixpence. ’) Were they to run a race with that? He thought, rather, they were in justice bound to pause, and not try to outrun the other colonies in their reckless dealing with the little that remained to them of their Crown lands. (Hear, hear.) If they waited a year or two till they had disposed of their land they would be in a better position to deal properly with their-own. If one reckless individual in trade chose to dispose of his stock for less than it cost, ought an honest tradesman along­side who wished to meet his engagements compete with him ? That was the position. (Hear.) It was said that it was to their benefit to have population; but ought they to induce people without capital to come here to “ eke out a miserable existence,” as the hon. member for Mount Barker said, by settling on land when they could much better be employed as farm labourers by those who were able to pay them wages. As he believed giving very liberal terms would have that effect, he should oppose the Bill.

Mr. HAY said the hon. member dunned them with wanting to give away the land, and they had heard last session a great deal of talk about doing so; but he denied that any such thing was done. The present Act was very little more liberal than the old one, and it seemed they were to keep on with the restrictive system of retarding the settlement of the colony. Whilst the other colonies were obtaining population and increasing the value of their land, the hon. member and some others who acted with him tended to reduce the value or property here. Even the few people who had taken up land had increased the price of every acre about them; and though only 12,000 acres had taken up under the credit clause, he did not regret it, for the terms were not liberal enough, and it would be to the discredit of the House not to grant better. The concessions now proposed would be a great benefit, for no man ever laid out 5s. an acre in improvements the first year of occupation. He thought it would be advisable to include the cultivation in improvements. Several hon. members had sneered at this Bill as being an instalment of what they might expect every year. What was the House for unless it was to make amendments in laws which were found defective. How often in reference to leasing the waste lands of the Crown had Acts been passed? There was not a session but what there was one, and sometimes two, and voted for by the very men who opposed this Bill. He did not agree with the hon. member Mr. Cheriton that seven years credit should be allowed, as he considered five years were quite long enough. He would much rather reduce the amount to be paid on the purchase-money from 20 to 15 or 10 per cent. He would sooner that it was regarded as in New South Wales as part of the purchase-money. The hon. member had said this country could not be compared with Canada because of the facilities given here for the grazing of cattle. That might have been applicable some years ago, but not now. How were people to get commonage in the agricultural areas where every acre was supposed to be taken up? In the South-East, where one or two men held all the land in a hundred, it might be easy to get commonage, but where the land belonged to 50 persons it was very difficult. He thought it was a mistake that such a long time should elapse in the reduction of the price of the land in the agricultural areas from *£2* 10s. to the upset price. It was reduced 5s. per month, and thereby it was six or eight months before it got to £1 per acre. (No.) He should move, as an amendment to the third clause, that it be reduced 5s. each week, as that would give the farmer quite time enough to inspect the land and see what it was worth. Allusion had been made to the expenditure of money in bringing out immigrants. It was certainly very much better to pass laws which would help m attracting population on their own account than in spending their funds in bringing out immigrants for the benefit of other colonies. They ought to do something to attract men possessing a capital of £400 or £500 to come out and settle among them. It would be well if their land laws were so liberal as to make it worth while to have a pamphlet printed for circulation in England, pointing out to intending immigrants the many advantages offered by South Australia for settlement. (Hear.)

The TREASURER (Hon. H. K. Hughes) trusted that the amendment would be regarded as a sufficient concession to the spirit of liberality. If the alterations recommended by the hon. member Mr. Bean were carried out, there would be no revenue to carry on the machinery of government. It was very pleasant to talk about giving away for nothing what they had not had to purchase, but they had a primary duty to discharge towards those who had invested their capital in purchasing lands under the belief that their interests would not be prejudiced or their property depreciated in value by subsequent legislation. (Hear, hear.) Whilst they offered facilities to those having small means to work their way up, they had no intention to settle a pauper population on the land. If the acquisition of land was made so easy a matter as some wished, where were they to get their farm labourers? Their farmers would be standing idle for want of men to work for them, and every man almost would be a landed proprietor. He would much prefer that a farm labourer should first accumulate—which he was easily able to do with the wages ruling here—a little money before going upon the agricultural areas on his own account. (Hear, hear.) There were many reasons in favour of extending the credit time to five years; and although from a financial point of view he had rather begrudged the granting of another year’s delay in the payment of the purchase-money, he believed the con­cession would be beneficial. The comparisons drawn between the value of land in South Australia and in other places had been already well answered, but it was also to be remembered that the price of the land was affected by the degree of protection to life and property guaranteed to the purchaser. In South America farms might be given away for nothing, but the holders had to undergo the risk of having their crops reaped and the result of their labouis destroyed by Indians. There was no intention to interfere seriously with the price of land in the colony, and the Commissioner of Crown Lands had shown that the sales still kept up. All that remained was by giving facilities for settlement to induce a larger number of farmers to occupy the country. The agricultural area system came into operation on Monday next, and should have a fair trial. He believed the experiment would be a success, and that the terms offered by the Act and this Bill would be found sufficiently liberal. If any further concession was found necessary it would be easy to grant it. (Hear.)

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. W. Cavenagh) remarked that the question of the liberality or illiberality of the new land system had been settled last session, and all that was desired now was to facilitate the operations of the Act then passed, so far as related to areas. It was in order to enable a fair trial to be given to them that the amended Bill had been brought forward. The rest of the Act had worked well, and but for the areas, the measure now under consideration would not have been required. The hon. member Mr. Cheriton had taken exception to his statement that a farmer could take three crops off' new land in four years. He maintained that not only was this the case, but that in some instances four crops could be got off it in four years. Some purchasers would be able to get a crop off land included in the areas next year. In referring to the possibility of a bad harvest, he had only repeated the argument of intending purchasers; and in reference to the suggestion that they should follow the lead of Victoria, he contended that they would not be doing so, even if they increased the four years’ credit to seven, and gave three years’ time to make the first 5s. an acre improvements in. Besides, to extend the time to seven years would embarrass the Treasurer. It had been said that a liberal land law attracted population; but such had not been the case in Victoria, for even now the Victorians found it requisite to return to immigration. The arrangement for putting up all the land in an area at a certain price, and then gradually reducing the rate, was intended to prevent persons from rushing in to take the best sections, which would be the case if the land was offered at £1 an acre. Persons would be quite willing to pay a few shillings extra to secure a section with a road or water near it. He believed the Act, with the amendment now proposed, would work well.

The Bill was read a second time.