**SHEARERS’ ACCOMMODATION BILL 1905**

**House of Assembly, 19 September 1905, pages 288-91**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of PUBLIC WORKS,** in moving the second reading, said that the Bill was not a new one. In 1901 Mr. Hutchison brought down a measure which received the approval of the Assembly, the third reading having been carried -without a division. When the Bill reached the Legislative Council its pas­sage was delayed until it was numbered among the slaughtered innocents of the

session. He had had charge of the Bill in 1902, and once again it was passed by the Assembly after a short discussion. Once more it found its way to the Council, where objections were raised against it. It was said there that 95 per cent, of the stockowners were already making ample provision for the accommodation of shearers, and that therefore the Bill was not necessary. Members had to recollect that such legislation would not interfere with those employers who made the necessary provisions, but would only apply to those who did not. Such a Bill would not prove a hardship to those who already studied the comfort of their men. Some people might ask, ‘"Why should we attempt to deal with those men out in the country, where they had plenty of fresh air?” His reply to them was that that class of workmen needed protection just as much as those in the city factory. It bad been asserted that the Bill would increase the difficulties of pastoralists, but he thought there was very little force in a statement of that kind. The providing of good accommodation for men daring six or seven weeks of the year was not going to make or break the pastoral industry. The great question they had to decide in settling country was security of tenure. They had given that most liberally—al­though not too liberally. They had reduced the rents to a reasonable amount, and met the pastoralists by reducing the value of the improvements, and had made everything easy for the settlement of the country, and the simple requirements they asked in the Bill would not be of detriment to the pastoral industry. It had also been represented that the Bill would interfere with the industry because those who might violate its provisions and come under its penal clauses might be far removed from a Police Court; but that was rectified in the Prison Bill, which would provide that the Court could be held at any police station. It was further stated that the shearers had not asked for the measure, but he had been an official of the Shearers’ Union, and had attended their conferences, and he knew that resolutions had been passed asking that the South Australian legislation should be placed on a par with that of New South Wales and of the other States. Then again, it was said that the Health Acts served the purpose. There might have been something in that argument ii the Health Acts had been compulsory; but they were permissive, and the whole of them were not enforced in the country districts. There were exemptions covering the very parts affected by the present measure. The Bill did not interfere with shearing sheds, but only those parts where men associated and used when their day’s work was done. The Bill was an exact copy of the Bills which previously passed the House of Assembly. Its provisions are taken chiefly from the New South Wales Shearers Accommodation Act, 1901,” and clauses 1, 2, 3, *4. 5,* 6, 8, 9, 10, 11. and 12 were practically identical with the New South Wales Act. There is a slight departure from the New South Wales Act in section 5. In New South Wales inspectors of factories might be appointed inspectors, as well as officers of the police force; but the Bill only provided for police officers because their duties compelled them to visit nearly every station once a year, and they could make a general inspection. Section 6 was somewhat different from the New South Wales Act, which stipulates that the buildings for sleeping and dining rooms shall be build­ings separate from the shearing sheds. This provision was not necessary in South Australia, as such buildings were not attached to the woolsheds. Section 7 of the Bill also departed from the New South Wales Act, which latter provides, as in the Bill, that the sleeping accommodation of persons of an Asiatic race should have accommodation in a separate building from the other shearers, but also provided that there should be separate dining rooms for Asiatics. This latter requirement he had not included, but he had put in the provision relating to sleeping, because there was an objection to sleeping in the same room as Asiatics. It was not on account of dirt or unclean habits but the natural consequence of, the Asiatic’s physical for­mation. The New South Wales Act required the latrine accommodation to be not less than 25 yards from the sleeping or dining rooms and not less than 50 yards from the water supply. Those things would be met in South Australia. Some of the other provisions of the New South Wales Act were not incorporated in the Bill. For instance, in New South Wales it was stipulated that a sufficient supply of good drinking water must be provided for shearers; that sleeping and dining rooms must be provided with sufficient light and ventilation; that the floors of these rooms should be of an approved material; that proper cooking and washing vessels should be provided. It was also provided that buildings, other than the shearing sheds used by other than the shearing sheds used by sets of inspectors for the same buildings. The Premier would be wise to limit the inspection under the Bill to police troopers, and withdraw the provisions of the Health Act so far as they related to pastoralists and the other matters dealt with under the Bill..On the understanding that pastoralists in such positions as indicated by Mr. Warren would not be harassed—(Commissioner of Public Works—“Hear, hear.”)—he would support it.

Mr. ARCHIBALD had no hesitation in giving the Bill his hearty support. It would be difficult to bring an argument against it. They had legislated for the benefit of the masses who worked in factories, and there was no reason to neglect the men they were now dealing with. Already there were similar measures on the statute books of New South Wales and New Zealand. The Bill was not against the general body of pastoralists. The squatters generally were successful in providing well for their hands in the shearing season. From what bushworkers had told him, the properties which were likely to come under the influence of the Act were those held by financial institutions and banks. They were not particularly anxious that the accommodation for the men should be kept in good repair, and they generally told their managers not to spend a penny more than could be helped. It was very likely that after the passage of the Bill there would be an improvement in those properties. The Bill was aimed at the exceptional cases. It was surprising to him to hear objections to the Bill. Why should they make an exception? What was there about the particular class of labour involved that it should be outside the category of the legislation which in the past few years had done so much to improve the conditions of their brethren? In administration it would not be any great harm to limit the inspection to police troopers. They knew the districts in which they were stationed, and they were men of tact in the carrying out of their duties. They were not likely to place obstructions in exceptional cases. The objection had been raised that there might be an exceptional case in a new country where the owner of the run might not be in a position to erect buildings pro­perly equipped. The general trend of legislation of that character was such as induced him to feel certain that if a just reason could be shown for any laxity in complying with the condition of the law it would receive considerate attention from the officer on the spot, and the superior authorities later on so that no hardship would be inflicted. The argument advanced against the measure was of such a flimsy description that he hoped it would not be entertained by hon. members seriously. The Act would not be another hardship upon the pastoralists in South Australia. It cast no reflection upon them as a whole, as had been suggested, but only upon a small portion of them, who merited condemnation. Nine-tenths of the legislation passed by the House was directed against the minority—the exceptional cases—and it should not be viewed in any other light. He would have much pleasure in supporting the second reading of the Bill.

Mr. BURGOYNE would also support the second reading of the Bill. It was not a novelty by any means, but an old friend of former, days. Their late comrade, Mr. Handyside, had discussed it from one side, and Mr. Poynton from the other, and they had given some extremely valuable information. From that he had gathered that in a very few, instances indeed was there any restriction of the kind referred to, and that there were few exceptions to which it might profitably apply. Therefore those who did not come under its effect would not be injured by the Bill, and those who did might well do so in the interests of justice and humanity. Relative to the objection mentioned he thought it might easily be shown by reference to subsection 3, clause 10, that there was no risk of any unreasonable action being taken against employers. But for that he did not think he should have risen to speak on the Bill. He would like, however, to call attention to this subsection, which said:—"If the said employer fails to carry out an order made as aforesaid he shall, unless he satisfies the Court that he has used all due diligence to carry out the order, be guilty of an offence against this Act. and be liable to a penalty not exceeding £25, and for every day during his default a further penalty not exceeding £2.” Even in such a case as that referred to, where it was impossible to use buildings ordinarily utilized for that purpose, that should be sufficient reason why the conditions should not be insisted upon. He could not see that there was any danger in passing the Bill.

Mr. SENIOR had carefully perused the Bill, and considered that it was purely humanitarian in its aim. It would ill become any Legislature to reject it. He recognised its intention was to conserve the health of those who were compelled to go away from their homes. When they took into consideration that many of those men had clean and pure homes of their own, they must acknowledge that when they left their homes to carry on the great pastoral industry of the State the public was under an obligation to see that their health was properly cared for. The Bill provided for two simple things—the men’s food and where it should he served, and for a proper resting place. The amount might be advanced that this class of legislation was carrying things too far but it was absolutely certain that the persons who took that stand spared no efforts to surround their own lives with such circumstances as would serve to ensure the best possible health for themselves. The purpose of the Bill was to lift men from the condition of being wage slaves to self-respecting, honest workers, endeavouring to earn a livelihood. Personally l could not see anything in the Bill which was revolutionary in character, and was unable to perceive that the Leader of the House had yet introduced anything which indicated revolutionary tendencies as had been prophesied. If that was the worst legislation they were to expect from the Commissioner of Public Works all he could say was “Long may he live, and occupy the place he now adorns, and well does he deserves the support and appreciation of those whose wellbeing he is advocating.” He was pleased to observe that many of those who opposed the Commis­sioner of Public Works in politics were at one with him in regard to the humanitarian principles he was expounding here. Clause 4 said:—“The Governor, by notification in The Gazette, may appoint districts for the purposes of this Act.” He thought that there was in that clause distinct evidence that the pressure of the Bill might in some sense be taken away, so that in the extreme outside districts it would not be brought to bear with the same stringency as in other cases.

Mr. DUNCAN moved the adjournment of the debate. This was declared negatived.

The Hon. R, BUTLER called for a division, which resulted as follows:—

Ayes, 11.—Messrs. Allen, Blacker. Oatt, Duncan, Poster, Gilbert, Jamieson. Paech, Ritchie. Tucker, and Bu,tler (teller).

Noes, 22.—Messrs. Archibald, Burgoyne, Chesson, Coneybeer, Coombe, Goode, Ink­ster. MacGillivray, Miller, Mitchell. O’Loughlin, Peake. Pflaum, Ponder, Ro­berts. Sellar. Senior, Smeaton, Vaughan, Verran, Winter, and Price (teller).

Majority of 11 for the Noes.

Pairs. — Aye—Mr. James. No — Mr. Cummins.

Second reading carried