

bank hold debentures against the government purchased for them by the bank and its agents, in its name; together with the amount held by each person.

*Report on sundry petitions relative to repairing roads.*

Report on certain petitions concerning statute labor and road improvements in the Home district.

Select committee.

Mr. Ketchum,

Mr. Perry,

Mr. Mackenzie.

Report relative to repairing roads.

February, 21st, 1831.

TO THE HONORABLE THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

The Select committee to whom was referred the petition of the Commissioners of the Kennedy road, and certain other inhabitants of Scarborough; the petition of John Bagwell, Esq. and certain other inhabitants of Toronto, and the adjoining townships; the petition of James Boyes and 437 freeholders and others, inhabitants of the county of York, residing on or near Dundas street; the petition of David Jardine and 317 others, inhabitants of the townships of York, Etobicoke, Vaughan, Albion, Caledon, the Gore of Toronto, &c; the petition of Christopher Thomson and 39 others, inhabitants of Scarborough; the petition of Stephen Pherrill and 35 others, resident in the same township; the petition of a committee of the landholders of Scarborough appointed at the last township meeting; the petition of John Judge, Wait Sweet, and 35 others, freeholders and inhabitants of Toronto; the petition of John Lewis, Jacob Belfry, and 92 other inhabitants of York and Simcoe; the petition of Wm Robertshaw, John Fletcher, and 44 other inhabitants of the same counties; the petition of John Leflar and 116 other inhabitants of Chinguacousy; the petition of Henry Crosby, J. Wismer, Calvin Cole, and 139 other inhabitants of Markham; the petition of George Barclay and others of Pickering; and the petition of Silas Fletcher and others of East Gwillimbury, have agreed to the following report:

The Freeholders of Markham in their petition, state, in substance, that to change the statute labor laws would require a road tax instead of work, would be felt as a heavy burthen by a large majority of the people; that very many persons find it a hard matter to raise cash enough to pay the direct taxes already imposed by law; that to make ten years improvement at once, by borrowing on the security of a cash tax would leave the poorer classes of persons assessed without any opportunity, for 9 successive years, of paying their assessments in labor with the contractors—that in a country with a population thinly scattered over an extensive territory, it is expedient to allow each individual to work upon the roads he feels most interested in the improvement of, that the different persons through whose hands a cash tax would have to pass, would greatly lessen its amount; that to take from the freeholders the power they have so long enjoyed of appointing their own overseers, would be an encroachment upon their dearest rights as British subjects; that the settlers have a far greater interest in having good roads, than any commissioner that could be appointed for life; and that in all new settled townships the people have often to double or treble the amount of their statute labor in order to render their roads passable through large tracts of unoccupied and reserved lands; but altho' it is, and has been long and seriously felt as an evil of no small magnitude, that the settlers have thus been obliged to spend their time in making roads through these wastes, and although it has been most earnestly desired by them that the rents and proceeds of Crown and Clergy Reserves might be applied to the improvement of the roads and schooling, the freeholders are not aware that any one ever complained of statute labor, or desired to commute it; that had His Excellency's circular proposed to borrow money on the security of the sale of reserved public lands, instead of imposing an additional burthen upon the people, they "have not the least doubt that a much larger sum might thus have been raised for the immediate use of the province, and the statute labor" "left to keep the roads made, by such monies, in repair; and the event would have been hailed with rapture by the whole population;" that in a new settlement it is often difficult even for the settlers themselves to determine where a road can be made to the best advantage, and that to expend ten years labor now, would oblige the settlers to pay the tax to meet the loan, and do statute labor besides.—Your committee concur in sentiment with the petitioners.

The petitioners in Markham consider it inexpedient to adopt the proposition of the government for changing the statute labor system into an Assessment tax, payable in money, and embody in their petitions the reasons why that change should not be made.

The petitioners in Toronto wish no alterations in the Statute Labor laws, other than such changes as may be made from time to time at the annual Town meetings, and pray that a tax in money may not be levied.

The Petitioners from beyond the ridges express a strong degree of repugnance to the alterations proposed in the circular of the government.

The petition of the Select committee appointed by the landholders of Scarborough to oppose the change proposed in the road laws, recites the following resolution as having been adopted in that township at its annual meeting. "Resolved," that it is the opinion of this meeting that in the present state of the province

no plan can be adopted for the improvement of the highways better calculated to attain the desired object, than the one now in use, of each inhabitant performing Statute labor according to his rate upon the assessment roll."

The petition of the freeholders and other inhabitants bordering on Dundas street sets forth that it is expedient to improve that great thoroughfare by grants of public money so as to render it perfectly passable at all times of the year before Legislative grants to any considerable amount are made to improve any roads parallel to or side roads leading into the back country; that with a small sum granted for its improvement, the road between York and Dundas may be made a perfectly good road, that enterprising individuals have, at great expense, placed lines of stages on that road, which were for a long time attended with loss and are only now becoming of any benefit to the owners, and that it is inexpedient to alter the route of the mail from Dundas street to the lake shore road.

All the other petitions referred to your committee are for Legislative grants of money to be made to improve the roads and bridges of the county of York generally, or for grants wherewith to begin or complete certain specific improvements in particular towns or places within the said county; and some of the petitioners express an opinion that the expenditure of the monies granted last year for roads has been attended with very beneficial effects, and given great satisfaction to the country.

Two of the members of your committee have, during the last year, examined the state of many of the bye-roads through which the inhabitants of the back townships come to market with their produce; and find them in general in a wretched state. Were the reserves appropriated to pay the interest of a loan to macadamize the great roads, and tolls afterwards established to keep them in repair, it would enable the Legislature to bestow a far greater sum annually upon the bye-roads; which would widen the circle in which produce is brought to this town; diminish the expense of carriage; induce new settlers to go back into the wilderness; enrich these settlers; stimulate the whole population to increased industry; and thus become a powerful means of adding to the wealth and prosperity of the country.

Your committee are of opinion that, (however well meant) a more inexpedient mode of improving the roads than that suggested by the Executive gov't. could scarcely have been devised. It proposed to anticipate the next ten years statute labor of the farmers of the colony, by borrowing between two and three hundred thousand pounds upon the security of a tax to be substituted in place of road work; and that the sum thus borrowed should be at once expended on the roads under the inspection of commissioners to be named by parliament. The Crown reserves, the clergy reserves, the college land and the Canada Company's conditional purchase, with the waste lands unsurveyed in the rear of certain Districts, compose perhaps a fourth part of the whole landed property in the colony. These lands pay no taxes, and produce little public benefit; yet by running the agriculturists in debt, as was proposed, they would have been at once raised in value 6d. to 5s. an acre, and the Clergy, Crown, College Council and Canada Company would not have been called on to expend a farthing or sell a lot in aid of the undertaking. However unpopular tolls may be, they would be preferable to his Excellency's proposition—for they only who travelled would have to pay—Adam Smith's doctrine concerning roads and tolls appears more reasonable as an abstract proposition. He argues thus. "The expense of maintaining good roads and communications is, no doubt, beneficial to the whole society, and may, therefore, without any injustice be defrayed by the general contribution of the whole society. This expense however is most immediately and directly beneficial to those who travel, or carry goods from one place to another, and to those who consume such goods. The turnpike tolls in England, and the duties called peages in other countries, lay it altogether upon those two different sets of people, and thereby discharge the general revenue of the society from a very considerable burthen."

Several petitions numerous signed, were last year presented to the Legislature, some in favor of, and others opposed to the establishment of Toll Gates on Yonge Street. The Freeholders of Markham in their petition before your committee, represent, that Tolls would be felt as a grievance of no small magnitude, for example, say they,—“Suppose a man residing in Brock, or Thornah, or any of our new and distant settlements sixty miles from York, should have one load of produce to carry to York in a year, and many of them will not have more—His county tax is 5s.—his toll would be one penny a mile going, and the same returning, which would be 10s—he performs the journey in five days, at an expense for himself and his team of 5s. per day—his load is worth say £3—leaving him nett 17s. 6d. wherewith to furnish his family with a twelve month's necessary articles of merchandize, the like sum having been reserved for commuted statute labor and tolls—while the man has also to work 6 or 8 days in a year to keep his woody swampy roads in such a condition as will enable him to travel in his own neighbourhood.”

In Lower Canada the toll bar between Montreal and La Chine has enabled the trustees to keep that section of the travelled road to this province in good repair.—In winter the tolls are not collected.

In England and Scotland tolls were established about 80 years ago and were authorised by separate acts of parliament.—“When a proposal is started for the establishment of a new toll in any county or parish, a meeting of the proprietors of the lands through which the road is to run, and whom of course it is intended to benefit, is summoned—there the plan is laid before