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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Cotton States in Detail What the Opposition Have Against the Government.

The Provincial Secretary Heard in Reply—Budget Debate not yet Concluded.

WEDNESDAY, March 30. The Legislature took up another day in discussing the budget, but as there was other important public business to attend to the Premier moved at six o'clock an adjournment till next day. This was acceded to.

The house was opened with prayer by Mr. O. E. Kendall.

RETURN. The Attorney-General presented returns relating to the Nelson & Fort Sheppard railway.

THE BUDGET DEBATE. Mr. Cotton resumed the debate on the budget. He would not go into a lot of details in the estimates but would refer to some of the principal points.

The expenditure had grown enormously during the past year. He could not help comparing the speech of the finance minister this year with that of ten years ago for any one who read the speech of ten years ago would see that the predictions then made under very similar conditions had not been fulfilled. Within the past few years the revival of mining had stimulated the other industries of the province and in 1888 there was a similar revival owing to the impetus given by the building of the C.P.R., so that the conditions in 1888 were very similar. For 1888 the estimates of revenue were \$601,000 and this year \$1,403,000.

The finance minister ten years ago in presenting his estimates had said that he would lay such a foundation for prosperity by the expenditure that it would bring about a lightening of taxation. The finance minister's predictions of ten years ago were falsified by results. Instead of the people being less taxed they had to pay more. For the taxation ten years ago was only 26 per cent. of the revenue and this year it was 30.9 per cent. and in fact they would have to tax the people 30 per cent. of the revenue to enable the services to be kept up that were now paid by the municipalities instead of by the province.

The revenue in 1888 was \$29,000 and this year is estimated at \$1,453,000, an increase of \$1,424,000 per cent. Whereas the expenditure in 1888 was \$750,000 and this year is estimated at \$1,995,000, an increase of 162 per cent., which shows that the expenditure had increased faster than the revenue. The finance minister assumed the debt of the province was \$1,743,000 and now was \$5,506,000, or an increase of \$3,763,000. The face of this the government could not pretend that the finances were in a prosperous condition.

The ratio of the population as 11 to 5 and the burden of debt with all the increase of population was heavier now than it was ten years ago. He had estimated the population for 1888 on the census of 1881 and the present population on the census of 1891. In 1888 the population was \$29 and this year it was \$57. The percentage of the revenue taken up by the public debt was in 1888 44.8 and now it was 29.9. The general expenses were increasing at a greater proportion than the revenue. The difference between the revenue and the expenditure in 1888 was \$5.50. He was just taking the same figures that had recently been presented in a different way.

Hon. Col. Baker laughing—"That's true, but I don't deny it." Mr. Cotton went on to say that the Chinese entrance tax was \$500 in 1888, and in 1898 was \$30,000, an increase of 60 per cent. to the present revenue.

Hon. Mr. Eberts—"Why don't you explain where that tax comes from?" Mr. Cotton replied that it came from the entrance of Chinese into Canada.

Hon. Mr. Eberts—"Just so. It's a Dominion tax." Mr. Cotton went on to argue that it was the incapacity of the government. The expenditure on public works had come to \$1,995,000 in 1898, an increase of 162 per cent. since 1888, and the increase on public works this year was, he intimated, only due to the coming elections. The increase in expenditure, he said, showed the business in capacity of the government. The increase in this branch was 11.9 per cent. over the year, but the taxpayers were not in any better position to pay this year than last year. He held that the taxes should have been reduced instead of being increased in any way.

In 1888 the estimated expenditure for education was 18.46 per cent. of the revenue, while this year was 19.27 per cent. of the revenue. The increase in the personal property tax in the ten years had failed, he argued, to balance the ordinary expenditures by the ordinary revenue. Mr. Cotton questioned the offer to convert the old loans would make a sum sufficient to give the London brokers confidence that there would be at their hands a large body of stock and therefore the government would be able to get better terms. It had had just that effect.

The Premier continuing, took up the parliament buildings, holding that they cost \$1,200,000.

Hon. Mr. Turner, sarcastically—"That's as near as you can get." Mr. Cotton went on to say that the sum for attendant at the capitol building was set down in the estimates this year at \$14,512.

The Premier here set Mr. Cotton right by showing that it was only \$5,832. Mr. Cotton said that the estimate in the Provincial Secretary's office as well. This \$5,832 included all the attendants, that formerly were scattered about the various departments.

Mr. Cotton repeated that the attendance was to cost \$14,000.

The Premier—"You have done away with the Provincial Secretary, then."

Mr. Cotton next claimed that most of the creameries were carried on without government support, yet the government took credit for assisting the creameries. The government had not taken sufficient care to secure themselves for the note given for Leamy & Kyle Mill company. In reference to the correspondence between the Province and Dominion governments as to the protection of the river banks at Revelstoke, Mr. Cotton said that it did not include correspondence by Hon. Theodore Davie when Premier, with Ottawa.

Hon. Mr. Turner explained that he had understood that the correspondence was that in connection with his own visit to Ottawa and no previous to the time he became Premier.

Mr. Cotton argued that the provincial government had tried to bulldoze the government at Ottawa in that matter and then had been obliged to back down from their position.

Mr. Cotton was beginning to complain about the site for a drill shed for Vancouver when the Premier—"That is all fixed already." He proceeded to explain that the representatives of the military in Vancouver had expressed themselves as willing to give ground but now new arrangements had been entered into.

Mr. Cotton complained that although last year the government had expressed themselves at the beginning of the session as willing to do away with the miners' tax the bill still stood. He spoke in favour of the redistribution bill, too, should have been brought down this year with that of ten years ago and said the finance minister should have got better terms in London.

The Premier—"Produce them." Mr. Cotton was at pains to explain that he was not responsible for the statements made from Vancouver.

Hon. Mr. Eberts—"You're not the whole of Vancouver." Mr. Cotton wanted to know if a mere newspaper scribbler or two-penny-half-penny newspapers could injure the credit of the province in the London market.

He went back to the loan of 1895 of £20,000 and read from the prospectus and said that the only condition apparently on which the loan could be borrowed for three years following.

Mr. Hunter denied there was any pledge. Mr. Cotton went on to say that the government had been a failure in its railway policy. The government had apparently in view asking the people to contribute to the building of a railway the whole country was in an uproar about. Instead of giving money to speculators, some arrangement should be made by which the government should either own railways or at least have an interest in them.

He said that an influential man that he and his associates were ready to build a railway in the interior but were blocked by the railway company which he had been lenient in enforcing the provisions of the land act against the poor.

He said that the railway company would put an end to charter mongering and putting the money of the country in the hands of speculators. He closed in a three hour speech by saying that the government of the province was too centralized.

Capt. Irving, who had just returned from the north, congratulated Mr. Cotton on his speech, but differed decidedly from that gentleman in his view of the railway policy.

Mr. Cotton had treated the country in a fair and liberal manner, and he was quite satisfied that they were not in the hands of speculators.

He added a word or two in reference to the friendly feeling that had recently developed between the people of the Empire and those of the United States, and hoped that before the session was over that the legislature would give voice to the sentiments that were felt by the Anglo-Saxon race, that the Union Jack and the stars and stripes should be entwined in an alliance of good feeling and brotherhood.

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There was an example of that in the item of \$1,165,500, which Mr. Cotton had misrepresented as being down in the estimates for attendants of the parliament buildings, when, as a fact the Provincial Secretary's department salaries were also included. That was just on a par with all the figures Mr. Cotton had put before the assembly.

He pointed out the opposition press indulged in before the session, how the government were going to be ground out by the disclosures of the opposition, Col. Baker was amazed at the results, for nothing had come of it all but the opposition had played over and over again for years. In fact it would be only a waste of breath to follow the figures of his work, but it gave a few concise statements as to how the government had administered the affairs of the country.

He would go back some years to institute comparisons, for in a province where such rapid development was going on and where there were rapid changes in a few years would hardly give a fair comparison.

It is universally acknowledged that the incidence of taxation should be as light as possible on the people and a government should not try to impose taxation on the people, but endeavor to do as much as possible to get the most favorable offers on the market in London, and therefore it was desirable at the same time to try and convert certain of the old loans into new ones, and that the incidence of taxation is lighter, then it must be admitted that the government administered the affairs of the country during that period the total expenditure on public works had been \$4,824,709. Now, deducting from this the revenue that was raised by the Dominion revenue that was not regarded as the provincial revenue the revenue in 1896-7 was \$1,054,145 and in 1897-8 being \$1,674,145, the increase of 1897-8 being \$620,000, the total revenue shows an increase of 438, the total revenue shows an increase of \$845,212 or 45.3 per cent. That increase came about from the expenditure on public works and was a highly satisfactory showing for the year. The plain figures and facts. The total expenditure on public works from 1888 to 1898 was \$1,200,000 and in 1898-9 was \$1,995,000, an increase of 66.25 per cent. The total expenditure had been \$1,669,071, of which \$519,164 had been expended on public works. These figures do not include public works, was \$1,049,907. In the same year the revenue was \$1,338,048, so that deducting the revenue from the expenditure exclusive of public works there remained a balance of \$333,141 revenue which would have been quite sufficient had there been no extraordinary expenditure on public works, to keep up the repairs on what public works were there in 1888. But as he had already shown, this large expenditure on public works had enabled the revenue to expand to a very large extent, at a very little increase of taxation, as he could prove.

Calculating the population of the province in 1888 at 60,000, the estimate was only \$2.29 per capita in 1897, with a population of 100,000, 2.86 per capita, a slight increase, but that slight increase was made possible by the borrowing of money in public works and so become remunerative. It must not be forgotten that this large sum for public works included the parliament buildings which were the last ten years the country had passed through a terrible world-wide financial crisis, and that it was because of the government having invested a large sum in public works during that time of depression to help the people tide over the trough of the depression.

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on to say that the provincial government had allowed the Dominion to take out of the province \$6,563,000 more than they had expended there during the period between 1886 and 1897. He took exception to the salary for the mining inspector being put down in the estimates as only \$125 a month, and said that it was not enough pay for a good man. He then proceeded to move the following amendment to the motion that the Speaker leave the chair.

Mr. Speaker moved after "That" he struck out, and the following inserted: "whereas the estimates of revenue and expenditure, as submitted, show that the estimated expenditure exceeds by \$339,222.30 the estimated revenue, and whereas the first report of the Public Accounts committee shows an overdraft of \$190,254.05 at the Bank of B. C., and whereas the estimates of expenditure generally show the most complete disregard of economy and whereas the administration of the affairs of the province has not been carried on in such a way as to best conserve the public interests, therefore the Government has forfeited all claim to the confidence of this house and the country."

Mr. Speaker rose to ask for information. Did the motion cut off debate on the main question until the amendment was decided.

Mr. Hunter then asked the debate had to be confined to the amendment.

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Mr. Speaker replied that the amendment was not in order until it was disposed of, though the amendment was so wide it practically covered the whole question.

Mr. Forster, in seconding the amendment, said that on the authority of the Hon. Mr. Eberts, the Hon. Mr. Forster, continuing his remarks said that as the budget had been pretty well discussed, he would confine himself to only a few of the remarks made. It was apparent, he said, that the government would have to come to the people and ask for a loan to meet the deficit that there was a deficit and that deficit would still grow between now and the 30th of October next, and that the rate of interest which the province was now paying on loans was all due to the inscribed stock system, though he had nothing to say against that system. Even under the old plan the rate of interest fell from 7 per cent. in 1874 to 4 1/2 in 1887. He characterized as schemes for catching votes the cheap money for farmers, irrigation and cold storage plans which the government proposed.

Mr. Forster charged the opposition with trying to arouse sectional feeling between the island and mainland. It had not been since the 1870s that a provincial association, which was formed for the purpose of forwarding the interests of the mainland against those of the island and he had been a member of the ranks several members who had belonged to that association. It was to add to the mainland that the expense of the island, that association was formed.

Mr. Macpherson—"I deny that." Mr. Hunter then moved to deny it; it was sticking out too plainly. He proceeded to draw attention to Mr. Cotton's misstatements about the \$13,000 on the previous day which that gentleman had pretended was all for attendance at the capital buildings when he had said that the expenditure on the railway department was included in it. As to the mining tax, Mr. Cotton knew that it was removed many alien votes from the province. He had tried to catch votes the cheap money for farmers, irrigation and cold storage plans which the government proposed.

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It must not be forgotten that Nanaimo mining division was developing fast as a summary of the work done in the Nanaimo office showed. There had been 710 free miners' certificates issued, 157 mineral claims recorded, 257 certificates of work recorded and a revenue had been received from these and similar mining items of \$10,025 during last year. On Texaco Island there were mountains of iron ore from which iron had been made which has proved to be the best in the world. So good was this iron that the castings on one of the United States new battleships, the Philadelphia, had been made exclusively from Texaco iron. The price was only double the price was paid for this owing to its superior quality. There was every reason to believe that in the near future the mining of iron on this island would be one of the leading industries on the coast and at such a figure that it can meet inferior iron at the same cost.

The amendment was then put and lost on the following division: For—Messrs. Sward, Kennedy, Hume, Forster, Macpherson, Kelle, Williams, Vedder, Semlin, Cotton, Graham, Kidd and Higgins 15. Against—Messrs. Huff, Smith, Mutter, Helmeck, Baker, Turner, Martin, Eberts, Riffel, Adams, Stoddart, Walker, Pooley, Bryden, Rogers, Braden, Hunter, and McGregor 18.

Mr. Hunter in continuing the debate on the main question sarcastically congratulated Mr. Cotton on his mastery of contortion of figures. However, argument did not seem to do any good; it was impossible to convince gentlemen who had got into a groove from which it was impossible to move them. The argument of the opposition that the government had expended more than it had received was old and threadbare. The opposition had tried to force the hands of the government, and might as well have known beforehand that this could not be done. Mr. Cotton had based his figures on an estimate of population that was probably a fallacy, whereas Mr. Hunter pointed out that the per capita debt of the whole Dominion was \$83.55.

Mr. Hunter pointed out that the per capita debt of the whole Dominion was \$83.55. He said that the government had saved the country \$25,000 in the loan conversion. Mr. Cotton in referring to the Chinese entrance tax had taken care not to show that