

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Opening of the Budget Debate—The Premier Outlines Financial Affairs.

Afternoon and Evening Arguments of Government and Opposition.

Victoria, March 28.—The budget debate occupied this afternoon and evening sessions at the legislature. Beyond the matter in question little was done. A few preliminary interpellations were answered when the house opened in the afternoon, and Mr. Sword and Mr. Williams attempted to raise an question of privilege motions which Mr. Speaker ruled would require the customary two days' notice. As an experiment, the press gallery since Friday's sitting of the house had been moved to a temporary tribune slightly elevated above the level of the Speaker's chair, and just within the doors to the left of the Speaker's chair. Should this prove satisfactory, it will be replaced by a permanent tribune, let into one of the panels of the side wall. Mr. E. C. Howell having made a design for the proposed gallery, will not spoil its beauty of outline or position.

The house adjourned with prayers by Mr. O. E. Kendall, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist church.

PETITION.

Mr. Kennedy presented a petition from the owners of the land at the Cascade Development Co., with reference to amendments to the Land Registry Act. This petition was received.

Hon. Col. Baker, in answer to Mr. Graham, stated that two companies—the Cascade Development Co. and the Cascade Water, Power & Light Co.—had applied for a concession to take power from the Cascade Falls, Kettle river. The application of the former had been granted. The application of the latter was under consideration.

Pre Premier, replying to Mr. Vedder, said that \$1,265 was the total commission paid by the Cassiar Central Railway Co. for the taking up of the old debentures, and the issuance and exchange of the government debentures.

Mr. Martin, in answer to Mr. Higgins, stated that the Cassiar Central Railway Company had not yet designated the route for the Cassiar Central Railway Aid Act.

OUT OF ORDER.

Mr. Sword said he had a question of privilege to bring before the house. It was that no return had been made by the government of the sums paid out by special warrant. This return he contended, should have been brought down as early as possible in the session, and would therefore move that, whereas section 42 of chap. 166 of the Revised Statutes provides that the government shall present to the legislature as early as possible in the session a statement of all expenditures made by special warrant, as far as the house has now been in session since February 10, more than six weeks, and such statement has not yet been presented, he moved that the committee on public accounts be instructed to make immediate inquiries as to the cause of this delay, and report thereon to the house.

The Premier remarked that the subject had escaped his attention, but he would have the return brought down as early as possible, and he was anxious to know what question of privilege was contained in the motion proposed.

Mr. Sword stated that as it was a question dealing with the control of the expenditure it was one of privilege of the house, and therefore of any member of the house.

Hon. Mr. Turner said there was no necessity for the motion. It could quite easily be understood that the Premier had a great number of returns asked for since the session began, the auditor, whose duty it was to present them, had not had time to make them out. However, he had just had a note from the auditor to the effect that the statement would be brought down in a few days. There was no use of Mr. Sword endeavoring to make political capital out of this motion, for it did not in the least affect the estimates now before the house.

Mr. Speaker ruled that the motion was not in order. The question of privilege affecting Mr. Sword personally, and would therefore have to be brought down by notice as in the case of any other motion.

Mr. Cotton and the leader of the opposition both took the ground that Mr. Sword was in the right, and that the return should have been brought down before the estimates were offered for consideration.

The Premier read from the act showing that the auditor shall present a statement of the warrants issued as early as possible in the session. Certainly the act did not say that the statement must be down before the estimates. Supposing the government had brought the estimate to the house on February 10, we reduced this to \$75,000, but find that that amount was still far too high. There was, however, no possibility for arriving at a close estimate at the time.

Turning to the other side, those lines of revenue that largely exceeded the estimates, I claim that at the time the estimates were made, there was no reason to think that they would be such a sudden increase. These estimates, it must be remembered, were made in February, 1893, for the year commencing the 30th of June following. The Premier's certificates for the year before the only year that could be taken for a guide, produced under £22,000, and in February, 1893, there was nothing to indicate so enormous an increase as we see in 1893. We, however, estimated the receipts at about fifty per cent. increase. They really amounted to 400 per cent. The same remarks apply to all the lines of great receipts which are all more or less connected with the great revival in the mining industry.

On the other side of the account we find that the expenditure was also in excess of the estimates. In a great measure this arises from the rapid development of the country, and the consequent demand for roads, government offices, police protection, etc., which had to be provided for, for which we find that there was a balance left on hand to commence the year 1893-94 of some \$228,000.

Taking the current year up to the 30th of June next, it is evident from the receipts on the account of revenue, that the total amount exceeded the estimate made at the end of last session, namely \$1,288,089; but on the other hand the demands for expenditure for urgent works have suddenly arisen largely owing to the causes already mentioned, accounting for the increased expenditure for the current year. This has made it absolutely necessary to add to our expenditure for the purpose of opening up roads and trails, establishing offices for mining records

and other government officers, increasing our police force, particularly in what is known as the North and East areas.

This expenditure in order to be effective had to be undertaken at once; but it is of such a nature that in the year the revenue of the province will feel the benefit and be largely augmented by it.

It is evident that the sections of the province to the North and East are going to be rapidly developed, and in order to encourage this it will be necessary to take energetic steps to open them up.

Mr. Speaker—I again devote my time to make what may be by many considered to be the most important resolution of the session, it being that for going into committee of supply. This is the time that legislative bodies under British constitutional government asserts the traditional rights of the independence of parliament, by discussing generally all subjects that relate to the conduct of the government of the country. In our case, sir, some of the opposition have been so eager to show their constituents their valiant fighting qualities that they have rushed into the fray considering the matter as a mere matter of setting up windmills to tilt at, and I fear to a certain extent, exhausting themselves in discussing the estimates before any estimates were laid before the house.

I think more than a week was taken up by these gentlemen before they discovered they were stopping the work of the house to no purpose. Now, sir, I propose to give them a fair opportunity. The estimates are now in their hands, and they have something to offer as a legitimate subject for debate, which they had not before.

If we turn to the estimates I have no doubt that the members on all sides will be gratified at the disclosures made. They will, however, be disappointed at being unable to take up their old cry—that the bad government of the province is steadily reducing the revenue. As we all know at the last election, they were only a few months ago crying that they had not a cent of money. They are now crying that the government is going to expand largely in public works in order to buy up constituencies, or, as they say, buy the votes of the electors. Or they will complain that the revenue for the last financial year is so much more than the estimates, that it is a very happy result. They will also say that the government does not represent the country, that although the government got 1867 votes at the last election and the opposition only 13,478, still the opposition are the real representatives of the country.

Well, the house and the country know all the arguments on these points by heart, and evidently do not take any more interest in the matter. We have, the same pre-election cry that we had in 1894, that the government was going to be completely swept out of office in the coming election; but the sweeping in 1894 was the other way, and I feel much more confident that the result of the next election will be even more in favor of the government than they were at the last election.

I have already alluded to the great increase of revenue. If we turn now to the public accounts, up to the 30th of June last, we see that the revenue was \$1,288,089, the estimate being \$1,168,689, the estimate being thus exceeded by some \$220,000, a very happy result, and, I think, a very ample margin for the government, although it does not please the senior member for Vancouver. If we turn to the total amount of the revenue, we find that the total receipts were estimated at \$1,000,000, and produced \$500,000; revenue tax, estimated at \$600,000, produced \$458,550; land tax, estimated at \$120,000, produced \$108,000; wild lands, estimated at \$45,000, produced \$41,511; mining tax, estimated at \$75,000, produced \$29,788.

These were the principal lines of revenue that fell short of the estimate. On the other side, we see that the estimates were exceeded by \$250,000, the excess being as follows: revenue tax, \$146,681; mining receipts generally estimated at \$60,000, gave \$157,408; interest on government securities, \$50,267; the revenue tax estimated at \$38,000, produced \$69,047.

The senior member for Vancouver calls attention to these differences and says that the estimates are a farce. Now, in reply, I would turn first to those which fell short of our estimate, and only ones of importance being land sales and mineral tax. The shortage in the land sales is due to the fact that the sale of certain townsites by auction was put off and consequently the receipts came in to the following year and succeeded years. As to the mineral tax, as is well known, this is a new tax. It was difficult to say just what it would yield. The only information that could be obtained about it was from mining men. These generally estimated that the receipts from this source would reach from \$40,000 to \$100,000. We reduced this to \$75,000, but find that that amount was still far too high. There was, however, no possibility for arriving at a close estimate at the time.

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