

Debate on School Bill

Mastery Argument of Mr. Murphy of East Yale in Its Support.

Messrs Oliver, Helmecken and Curtis Continue the Discussion.

Legislative Assembly, Friday, March 15. The Speaker took the chair at 2:15 p. m.

Rev. E. S. Rowe offered prayer. The following reports were received: From Mr. Helmecken, eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth reports of the committee on private bills, as follows:

"The preamble provided of an act incorporating the board of trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and submit the same herewith with amendments."

"That the standing orders in connection with the petition of the Yale Northern Railway Company have not been complied with, inasmuch as, while the rules as regards publication were complied with within time, the requirements of Rule 57 were not. Double fees have been paid, but as the proposed bill is presumably in the public interest, your committee are of the opinion that the standing orders should be suspended so as to admit of the introduction of the bill, and beg to recommend the same accordingly."

"That they have considered the petition of the British Columbia Mining Association for leave to present a petition for leave to introduce a bill, and find that the petitioners duly complied with the rules as regards publication, but that, owing to the absence of several of the petitioners, it was impossible to have all the petitioners sign the petition for leave within time. The requirements of Rule 57 have been complied with. Your committee are of the opinion that the standing orders should be suspended, so as to admit of the presentation of the petition, and beg to recommend the same accordingly."

"The standing rules were suspended and the reports adopted. Mr. Ellison introduced a bill to incorporate the Yale Northern Railway Company, which was read a first time. Mr. Peoley presented the fifth report of the railway committee, an act to incorporate the Midway & Vernon Railway Company, which was read a first time. Hon. Mr. Wells introduced a bill respecting inspection of steam boilers and the examination and licensing of engineers in charge of steam boilers and engines, which was read a first time. Hon. Mr. Prentice introduced a bill to incorporate the order of the Hospital, which was read a first time. Mr. Curtis asked the Provincial Secretary the following questions: Have officers been appointed to enforce the provisions of the British Columbia Immigration Act at interior railway points on the coast of the province? If not, does it intend to do so, and if so, when? If it does not intend to do so, what is the reason for such failure to enforce the act?"

Hon. Mr. Prentice replied: "Yes, upon the recommendation of the immigration agent for the Mainland district, a deputy immigration officer has been appointed at Grand Forks and at Greenwood." Mr. Curtis asked the Minister of Finance: "Of the revenue of \$204,018.41 received from West Kootenay district during the last fiscal year, how much was received from the mining divisions of Thompson, Nelson and Sloan, respectively?"

Hon. Mr. Turner replied: "Returns furnished by district assessors and collectors do not conform to the requirements of mining divisions in showing the revenue derived from each division separately; therefore, the information cannot be given from the data at the department."

Mr. Tatlow asked the Provincial Secretary: "Is it the intention of the government to proclaim the 24th of May (Empire Day) a public holiday?" Hon. Mr. Prentice replied: "The following bill is now before the Dominion House: 'An Act Respecting Victoria Day—His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows: (1) Throughout Canada in each and every year, the 24th day of May, when not a Sunday, being the birthday of her late Majesty Queen Victoria, shall be a legal holiday, and shall be kept, and observed as such under the name of Victoria Day. (2) When the 24th of May is a Sunday, the 25th day of May shall be, in lieu thereof, a legal holiday throughout Canada, and shall be kept and observed as such under the same name."

The answer was received with cheers. The debate on the School Bill was resumed by Mr. Murphy. The bill could not be considered without also considering the act amending the Assessment Act. The bill proposed extending the system inaugurated in 1893, in the case of the Coast cities, to the other cities and towns of the province, and this could not be done without a readjustment of the taxation. This would most affect the Coast cities, and the leader of the opposition had protested that it would increase Vancouver's burden by \$3,000, and probably slightly increase that of other cities.

Figures showed the present cost of education to be as follows: For 1899-1900, amount of revenue, \$1,544,108; expenditures, less public works and education, \$1,100,136; expenditure for education, \$286,310; equal to \$1,886,435, which deducted from the total revenues, left only \$197,653 for maintenance and public works in existence and for carrying on new ones. This showed how matters stood, and Mr. Martin must admit that such a state of affairs could not continue. The country must be opened up and developed. Members from one district wanted smelters and refineries; all were clamoring for roads and bridges; the Coast-Kootenay and other

railways must be constructed, and it was clearly impossible to do any of these things without an increase of revenue. The expense of education had increased steadily from year to year, and would be seen by the following figures: 1894-4. Amount of revenue, \$ 821,900. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$23,770. For Education, 168,050. 1894-5. Amount of revenue, \$ 806,025. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$69,673. For Education, 180,037. 1895-6. Amount of revenue, \$ 893,785. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$78,038. For Education, 204,930. 1896-7. Amount of revenue, \$1,885,048. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$29,007. For Education, 230,510. 1897-8. Amount of revenue, \$1,430,622. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$1,003,735. For Education, 247,736. 1898-9. Amount of revenue, \$1,531,638. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$1,006,730. For Education, 268,553. 1899-1900. Amount of revenue, \$1,544,108. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$1,100,136. For Education, 286,310. Amount for public works, \$ 252,240. 1899-1900. Amount of revenue, \$1,544,108. Expenditure less P. W. and Education, \$1,100,136. For Education, 286,310. 1898-9. Amount for public works, \$ 157,653. By those figures it was seen that from 1893 to 1900 the province, after paying fixed charges of administration for education, had nothing at all left for public works. In 1896-7 it had its first surplus to expend on public works, he regretted to say it had not had one since. In the face of these figures, what attempt was left to the government? Were they to let the magnificent resources of the province lie idle and unremunerative for want of money to put them in the way of being developed? There was but one way. The province must borrow money for development purposes, and it might safely do so, confident that it would be repaid a thousand-fold in a very few years. But they borrow successfully, to approach the money kings of the world and secure money on favorable terms, it was necessary that the province should be able to show a satisfactory statement of its revenue. The figures at present would not afford a convincing evidence of the province's financial standing, and if a loan was sought now the country would have to pay the highest rate of interest. There were certain fixed charges of administration that could not be avoided. The opposition would not, he believed, ask that official salaries be cut down; they were low enough already; nor did he suppose they would ask for a reduction in the grants to hospitals, to the police, or for public works? The educational expenses must be cut down, but there must be no reduction of the standard. The government suggested: First—To make the cities, as their population increased, bear a proportionate share of the increased cost of education; and second—To raise the revenue tax. As the bill now stood, the cities except perhaps the four Coast ones, get practically the same amount as formerly. Even in the Coast cities the difference was slight. Take Vancouver, for instance. With 3,000 children attending school, at \$13 per head, she would receive \$39,000, plus \$1,800 for salaries of high school teachers, equal to \$40,800. While under the present law she would receive \$30,000 for 3,000 children, at \$10 and the revenue tax, about \$18,000, making \$48,000. The increased tax of \$2 will produce about \$8,000, which is Vancouver's contribution to the general taxation. In discussing the new tax, the \$2 must not be considered as being levied on the cities by right. The revenue tax, if the whole additional taxation would fall upon the population outside of the cities. The Coast cities had advanced to the stage to which the new revenue of the interior were approaching, and the bill was only an effort to equalize taxation. If the government could devise some other feasible scheme, they would do so. Ontario raises her educational funds by local taxation; the government contributes very little. As the school population of the cities increases, they will find their school burdens increase, and why should they not? Increase of wealth, and the people should benefit. But the government would continue to aid. They would still contribute, under this bill, \$13 per capita, which was by far the largest proportion of the ordinary expenditure on schools. Moreover, the cities would get a grant for high schools, of which they were in need. It was a case of choosing between this reduction of expenses of education or lowering the standard of education and development of the province.

He was pleased with Mr. Martin's criticisms of the bill. He said that the smaller cities would have to provide school buildings. Well he (Mr. Murphy) thought the government should see that the cities were not left to fend for themselves. He said that he had not seen any of the people least able to pay taxes in the laboring classes. In that he was wrong. The province must have money for public works, railways and general development; there must be increased taxation. But the government did not start by imposing this revenue tax. Last session they imposed a tax on coal and on the mineral output, and during the recess they abolished the rebate on lumber. Mr. Robbins, of the New Vancouver Coal Company, begged the government not to impose the tax on coal; it would ruin the industry. Other industries protested against being taxed. Mine-owners and lumbermen declared they could not stand it. The member for Rossland vehemently opposed putting a tax on minerals. In fact, every person whose pocket was affected cried loudly against being taxed. He was glad that the government had had the courage to take a determined stand. Mr. Curtis—On what ground did I oppose the tax? Mr. Murphy—I only said you did oppose it. I did not attempt to explain your reasons. Mr. Curtis protested again, but Mr. Murphy repeated that he had opposed the tax most strenuously, whatever his motives might have been. Every tax

is opposed, no matter what class it touches, and the increase in the revenue tax must meet with opposition, like those which went before it. (Applause.) No one would venture to say that the government has not expended the money derived by those taxation to the best advantage, or that they had spent a dollar unprofitably. It was absurd for him and his fellow-members to come to the house and ask large appropriations for their constituencies, and then, when taxation was proposed, oppose it. The ordinary citizen would blame the supporters of the bill for assisting the government in imposing this new tax of 2, but in time all would come to acknowledge its justice. Mr. Martin owned that the bill had some good qualities; it would reach the Chinese and Japs. He was informed by the members from Cariboo that the miners there would be willing to have the old free miners' tax reimposed in order to make the Chinese and Japanese pay their share of the tax. The opposition argued the poor would fall on the poor man was unfair. Property owners paid on their real estate and other property, and the revenue tax would be imposed on the poor. Would they still further tax the industries of the country? The proposed tax was a just one, and calculated to reach just that class which could not be reached in any other way, those persons who, enjoying the fruits of the land, in various situations, protected in their life and property, share paying their just share of the expenditure. The schools benefit the poor as well as the rich, for the latter can afford to pay for their children's education at private schools and colleges. Why should the poor man contribute to the general revenue? Was it not better that men should pay a tax of more than 2, with the immense bonded indebtedness? (Applause.)

The people of British Columbia were peculiarly well situated. They were not a laborer; to-morrow, by a stroke of fortune, a millionaire. No one could possibly be so rich. Their fortunes were to be made at every turn, and all had an equal chance, but the development of the country by roads and railways would increase those chances, and he felt sure that no one would object to contribute to such development. (Applause.)

Wages in British Columbia were higher than in any other part of Canada. The man who paid \$1 a day in Ontario was actually paying more than the one who paid \$5 a day here. In Ontario the government paid laborers \$1 a day; here they got \$2.50 a day. Give the average laborer here the alternative of working in Ontario for \$1 a day and pay no taxes, or earn \$2.50 here and pay \$5 a year tax, and he would accept? (Applause.) The revenue tax was not the terrible thing some people would make it. It reaches the Chinese, it reaches everybody, and no one can claim that it is too heavy. (Applause.)

On the question of collection, Mr. Martin said that fewer people would pay the government collectors; they would be more likely to evade the tax, amounting to about \$100,000. The population was, exclusive of Indians, about 175,000. That meant that only \$300 paid. Government collectors would be able to gather in the tax where the cities had no means of doing so. Authority would be avoided. Of course, there were people who would try to evade this or any other tax. The revenue tax was successfully evaded by many, but that was no argument against the successful collection of the proposed tax.

Speaking of the difference of opinion with regard to school management in cities, the clash between city councils and school boards, he would discuss it from a provincial standpoint. The bill made the law clear as it stands. Two courses were open. All powers should be given to the school board, or the council, or give them control of ordinary expenditures. If the first were adopted, it would be to give the school board the right to control ordinary expenditures. Mr. Martin does not suggest this, therefore he admits that education is more important than any other department of administration. What are the main objects of governing bodies? First, health; second, education. Even then, if it is better than too little. The trustees should have a free hand, within certain limits to be defined, regarding ordinary expenditures. Opposition to that portion of the bill came from city councils, who seemed to think that because they collected the revenue, they should be given absolute control. The trustees, however, are elected by a vote of the ratepayers, and their acts. There had been no examples of trustees committing unwarrantable extravagances, so far as he knew, either by the council or the council did wrong, the electors had the remedy in their hands.

At this point Mr. Murphy drew a telegram from the secretary of the Vancouver school board, protesting against the provisions of the bill restricting the powers of trustees, and new financial arrangements proposed. Mr. Martin had objected to third-class teachers holding three-year certificates, being obliged to attend the normal school. He agreed that it was too much to impose upon beginners, who could not afford to come from distant places. It would practically bar poor people from the profession of teaching if they did not live in or near Vancouver. The other certificates were granted for life, and he thought the applicants should go to the normal school. He would ask the government to rectify this in committee. The objection had been taken to the government notifying the teachers of new rules before the bill was passed. Under the old law many teachers would have had to present themselves for examination this year. That meant hard work added to their daily duties. In ordinary way with term certificates the government had done away with this hardship. He thought they had done right in notifying the teachers in advance.

In conclusion, he congratulated the government on the evident desire to accomplish the needed reform with the least possible departure from existing conditions. He considered their course a wise one, and he would do all in his power, as he hoped every other member would, to assist them in passing a law that would prove acceptable to the people of the province. (Applause.) Mr. Oliver agreed with Mr. Murphy in saying that the government had done courage in introducing the bill. He failed to find any principle in it. The government departed from the old law inasmuch as it was necessary to provide more revenue. People had to pay for schools in any event. It had been at the head of the department. He did not refer to Mr. Prentice, but to Mr. Turner, who, during his former term of office, had neglected to furnish school buildings at Rossland.

with Ontario. Conditions were distinctly worse. If the government administered the schools properly there was no occasion whatever for friction between city councils and school trustees. The fact of the matter was the entire system was to be changed for the benefit of a few high schools. Mr. Helmecken said after the logical and strong speech of the member for Yale he felt sure the bill would commend itself to the government. It was incumbent on the government to see that the interests of education did not suffer while having due regard to important public works. It spoke well for the government that Mr. Prentice declared he did not intend to oppose the second reading. But he thought it strange that he should have his opposition to the bill reading for reasons best known to himself. The proper time to object to the bill was after the reading, not before. There could hardly be any objection to the bill except in matters of detail which might be brought up in committee. Hon. Mr. Prentice had signified his willingness to accept amendments and to refer the bill to a committee. The age of a law that would meet with general approval.

Speaking for Victoria, civic delegations had indicated that they wished certain amendments. He had sent the school trustees a copy of the bill, but they had not answered or taken any steps to consider it. He understood they were considering it a matter of detail which might be satisfactorily settled. Referring to the duties of school trustees, he said they had a tremendous responsibility which it was difficult to administer to everybody's satisfaction. The bill provided that the trustees should be a first class body, and should be a great improvement on the present. He was a vast difference of opinion on the subject. It was absolutely necessary to find money for school purposes. His successors are elected by the people; they were returned for two years, and were not under the same restraint as the aldermen. All items of extraordinary expenditure should be submitted to a vote of the trustees. The long run have control. A great deal might be said on this subject, but he hoped the parties interested would take advantage of the courtesy of the Honorable the Minister of Education and settle their differences by amicable means. He suggested that the trustees be empowered to approach the council for funds to carry on the schools. The trustees claimed one in four of the school appropriation should be a first class body, and should be a great improvement on the present. He was a vast difference of opinion on the subject. It was absolutely necessary to find money for school purposes. His successors are elected by the people; they were returned for two years, and were not under the same restraint as the aldermen. All items of extraordinary expenditure should be submitted to a vote of the trustees. The long run have control. 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