

# JOHN OLIVER RIDDLES GOVERNMENT RECORD

## Retarding Development---Revenue From Natural Sources Decreasing---Bowser the Inflexible and the Fishery Tangle---Investigation Demanded.

Legislative Press Gallery, Jan. 28.  
Red-hot shot was poured into the government entrenchments to-day, and in spite of the apparent great strength of its position there is reason to believe that a breach has been made in its defences, which will ere long become practicable and admit the Liberal party to the citadel, from whence they may administer the affairs of the province wisely and in the best interests of the people at large.

John Oliver, of Delta, the first lieutenant of the opposition leader, was the speaker, the only one of the day, and delivered a speech which extorted the admiration of political adversaries, as it received the unstinted applause of his own side. Every feature of the government policy was assailed with irrefutable arguments, backed by figures from government sources and facts from common property. Coming from an agricultural community and himself one of the most successful farmers in the province, Mr. Oliver gave a good deal of attention to provincial affairs as they affect the settler, exposing the weakness and ill-effects of the McBride government's land and timber policies, and contrasting them with the statesmanlike proposals of the Liberal party for dealing with these sources of natural wealth.

The position was put very clearly by Mr. Oliver in the suggestion that the government policy is allowing land and timber speculators to get such a hold on the lands and forests of the province that it will be shortly in a worse condition than ever Ireland was. Instead of the revenue from natural resources increasing, as Conservative speakers in the debate have asserted, the member for Delta proved from the public accounts that there has been actually a decrease. At the same time there has been an alarming increase in the last fiscal year in the amount of land held for speculation only, to the exclusion of the genuine settler and lumberman.

Mr. Oliver was particularly effective in his references to the attorney-general, Mr. Bowser, is not thin-skinned, and is too good a politician to let the public accounts that there has been actually a decrease. At the same time there has been an alarming increase in the last fiscal year in the amount of land held for speculation only, to the exclusion of the genuine settler and lumberman.

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tax of \$18,000. I challenge anyone to controvert these figures. We thus have an increase in revenue of \$18,000, from these seven sources, out of which only one item is from the development of our raw materials, \$18,000 from the mining of coal. Mr. Davey's assumption is thus shown to be altogether unwarranted by the facts.

**Decrease Not Increase.**  
On the other hand we have a decrease in land sales of \$115,000 in land revenue or \$43,000, in mining of \$25,000, and in timber royalties of \$23,000, a loss of \$48,000 on the last two items. Deducting the increase in business taxes, we find that what it sells for in other places across the line. He said it sold in Seattle, freight and duty paid, at less than it does here. There is a reason for that. At the Conservative convention in Revelstoke in 1902 one of the planks adopted, and upon which they were elected in the following year, was that in every coal area there should be reserved a portion so that state mines could be operated. But in the records we find that when they had a chance every member on that side voted against it in the House.

This was a real grievance, such a grievance that legislation was introduced by one of the Vancouver members last session calling on the Dominion to investigate. We on this side took the stand that it was a matter for the province to deal with, and proposed that a committee of this House should be appointed to examine into the facts and devise a remedy without delay. But Mr. Davey, with the other Conservative members, voted down this proposition, and in bringing the facts to the light of day. Are his present remarks to be considered in earnest in view of his record?

**A Conditional Coal Tax.**  
I think this House is in duty bound to remedy that state of affairs, and the remedy is to be found in the government amending the Mines Act to the effect that there shall be imposed a tax, in addition to the present tax, of one dollar a ton on all coal exported, to be rebated in full conditional on the operators satisfying the government that the coal is being supplied to the consumers in British Columbia at as low a price as to those outside. (Hear, hear.) Thus the legislature has the remedy in its own hands. The policy was adopted in regard to timber and would work as successfully in regard to coal. The other side has rejected our proposals in this matter; we may now expect the support of the second member for Victoria. If we propose a resolution later on the subject of the coal tax, the government take this step.

**Mr. Hayward's criticism.**  
The member for Cowichan also had a complaint to make against his own government. No member has offered more severe criticism of the government than he has. When the school act was before the House, he made an objection to one of its features, but the government said the matter had been given full consideration. Yet the next session, after the act had been passed, he brought out a bill of 87 sections to amend a bill of a little over 100 sections. Every objection made by the member for Cowichan is valid, and I am sorry that he has not charged the matter. It was once proposed that the municipalities have power to raise a personal property tax for school purposes, but it was found that the machinery was so cumbersome that the cost of its operation would be more than the tax would bring in.

**Revenue From Natural Sources.**  
The speaker attributes the increased revenue to development of natural resources. If he had analyzed the public accounts he is too honest to have made this statement, so his figures must have been supplied to him. He told us that the revenue from timber licenses, including fees and penalties, amounted to \$2,302,000 as against \$1,563,000, and that royalties on coal amounted to \$206,000. These figures are inaccurate to a considerable extent. Instead of an increase of \$58,000 in royalties there was a decrease of \$23,000, a difference of \$35,000 on this item alone.

The increase in revenue are derived from four sources principally. In timber licenses there is an increase of \$1,250,000. Can it be argued that the alienation of our timber assets to an extent of \$1,250,000 is not a development of the natural resources? The increase is simply an advance of so much greater a sum than the year before by timber speculators to secure a hold on resources to be exploited in the future. There was an increase of \$115,000 in the annual subsidy from the Dominion and besides there was the special subsidy of \$100,000. There was a most extraordinary increase of \$226,000 from the Chinese head tax. Was that a development of natural resources? (Laughter.) Even the attorney-general with all his ingenuity, would not venture to assert that, and we can expect any kind of an assertion from that gentleman.

**Not a Benefit to Province.**  
There was an increase of \$76,000 from the wild land tax. The opposition have condemned and will condemn the policy which favors the speculator against the real settler. He will be blind to facts who thought this increase was a benefit to the province. The attorney-general said a year ago that the speculator must be given a chance and the government has certainly given him a chance. The increase of ten cents an acre on wild lands, means that 760,000 acres more than in the previous year have gone into the hands of speculators. That is not a policy in the interests of British Columbia. (Hear, hear.) We spend thousands of dollars to advertise our agricultural lands, but when we get settlers here we find them going back disgusted.

**How to Get Cheap Coal.**  
I have to compliment the speaker (Mr. Davey) not so much upon the alleged facts contained in his speech as upon the manner in which he made use of them. The matter of that speech was only too evidently supplied from outside sources. Some of his most important figures and deductions are not in exact accordance with the facts. In the course of his speech the hon. gentleman said it would tax the imagination of even the member for Delta to find a grievance against the government. He must have been more able to do so than I am, because he did not finish without finding a grievance against the government which he supports, as to the price of coal here, as compared with what it sells for in other places across the line. He said it sold in Seattle, freight and duty paid, at less than it does here. There is a reason for that. At the Conservative convention in Revelstoke in 1902 one of the planks adopted, and upon which they were elected in the following year, was that in every coal area there should be reserved a portion so that state mines could be operated. But in the records we find that when they had a chance every member on that side voted against it in the House.

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client to meet this case. Declarations of residence and improvement were made by the settler, and the government expended not a day's residence pay. In it is the duty of the government to see that the law is fulfilled in regard to these pre-emptions. There is ground to believe that a considerable proportion of these pre-emptions are fraudulent, that they are not recorded for settlement, but to obtain land and offer it to other speculators at rising prices. The speaker spoke of a government reserve until lands were surveyed, and he is evidently sincere when he thinks that policy tends to settlement. But he should remember that all lands not open to settlement are open to the speculator to take. Then when the government has decided that a survey shall be made of a certain section and that pending it there shall be no lands sold, there is no time lost before the survey gets under way. Take the case of the Nechaco valley and ask the chief commissioner how much of the land surveyed there has been purchased since the survey was completed on the ground at all. What is the use of reserving the land after it has been staked? Mr. Davey followed up by what I believe to have been an inspired guess, that the government would encourage actual settlement the practice has been adopted of reserving all sections selected for survey against entry, save by pre-emption, pending completion of the survey. The result is that these lands are absolutely reserved for the settler.

**Enriched by Settlers.**  
That settler is a man of small means. If he were a man of considerable means he would locate in a well-settled district where he could have the comfort he is used to. The man of small means waits till the survey is completed and then finds that one-third is reserved for the settler, that for every acre he improves for himself he improves two for the speculator. Suppose the 4,000 pre-emptions were in one block there would be 250,000 acres occupied by actual settlers, as against 760,000 acres of wild lands, or in the proportion of three to one. How long are we to have this condition in the province? Is it British Columbia? How long is the settler, lured by the descriptions of the glorious country and climate advertised and paid for by the province, and travelling hundreds of miles to get to the land, to find that the country is blanketed by the stakes of the speculator?

**Definition of Speculator.**  
The premier seemed to be considerably exercised in his mind as to the meaning of speculator. Without ever having a university education I would have thought he knew what it meant or what it stood for in the province. I would say to my mind the speculator is the man who acquires any property not for use but for the profit to be made in turning it over again, and holds it for an advance in price. The speculator is the man of what a speculator? Both in regard to coal and land and timber, and it is the definition as commonly understood in British Columbia. I do not hold the speculator up to scorn but I do say the policy of the government in the present taxation to meet this state of affairs, which has not all been brought about by the fault of the government. It is largely the result of the condition of our laws. In that old-settled district in some portions, four-fifths of the land is held by absentee landlords. We have to keep up altogether too many miles of road for the population. I am going to ask the members to assist before the session is over in meeting this condition. The first step is for the government to provide that these municipalities shall be put in possession of their own revenue from the sources I have mentioned, give them power to increase the wild land tax and to require a large amount of improvement to gain exemption from that tax. Do that and you have gone a long way to meet the case. I am going to ask the members to leave party out of the question and provide a solution in the interests of the people. (Cheers.)

The premier met the proposal of the leader of the opposition by a statement which was absolutely unjustifiable. We ask for the handing over to the municipalities of a revenue bringing into the province a quarter of a million, and the premier said it would lead us to bankruptcy and ruin. If it is true, as the public accounts show, that there is a surplus of \$1,300,000, how can it be true that to hand over \$250,000 of that would bankrupt the province? It is the duty of the government to realize the financial position of the municipalities of British Columbia, and if they reject this proposition we ask them to provide an alternative solution. (Applause.) The government has imposed additional duties on municipalities, notably with regard to schools, but has not provided for a corresponding increase of revenue.

**The Capital's Streets.**  
I would ask the finance minister or the commissioner of lands and works to get information from any municipalities as to the financial condition they are in. Right here in Victoria they are asking for money to beautify the city. The streets in this city are a disgrace to the capital of the province of British Columbia. You will hear people declare that they have heard of a place where they have seen the condition of the streets here that it must rain all the time because on the streets they were up to their knees in mud. Is it not a fact that if any municipality wants to make permanent improvements they have to borrow money to do it? If you investigate you will find that not five per cent of such works can be done out of the ordinary revenue of the current year. (Hear, hear.) If this condition is true, and I believe it is, how can the government escape its plain duty of providing more adequate revenue for municipalities? Hand them the taxes and give them the power to improve the streets by the means of improving these conditions.

Mr. Davey thought the farmer has abundant cause for thanksgiving and that he is getting good prices. The crops last year were not full and prices were low, but I suppose the farmer should be thankful that he has as good as he has and sufficient to meet the necessities he is subject to. Another cause of thankfulness was that the fire in the Ferns district, a most destructive fire took place it was not attended with greater loss of life, and that there is to-day a finer town springing up.

**Fraudulent Pre-emptions.**  
The speaker told us that there had been 1,000 pre-emption notices taken up last year. This is no evidence as to the number of bona fide settlers. I know of one enterprising company which issued a prospectus asking people to file pre-emptions and hand them over to it. The land laws are insufficient to meet this case. Declarations of residence and improvement were made by the settler, and the government expended not a day's residence pay. In it is the duty of the government to see that the law is fulfilled in regard to these pre-emptions. There is ground to believe that a considerable proportion of these pre-emptions are fraudulent, that they are not recorded for settlement, but to obtain land and offer it to other speculators at rising prices. The speaker spoke of a government reserve until lands were surveyed, and he is evidently sincere when he thinks that policy tends to settlement. But he should remember that all lands not open to settlement are open to the speculator to take. Then when the government has decided that a survey shall be made of a certain section and that pending it there shall be no lands sold, there is no time lost before the survey gets under way. Take the case of the Nechaco valley and ask the chief commissioner how much of the land surveyed there has been purchased since the survey was completed on the ground at all. What is the use of reserving the land after it has been staked? Mr. Davey followed up by what I believe to have been an inspired guess, that the government would encourage actual settlement the practice has been adopted of reserving all sections selected for survey against entry, save by pre-emption, pending completion of the survey. The result is that these lands are absolutely reserved for the settler.

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The premier met the proposal of the leader of the opposition by a statement which was absolutely unjustifiable. We ask for the handing over to the municipalities of a revenue bringing into the province a quarter of a million, and the premier said it would lead us to bankruptcy and ruin. If it is true, as the public accounts show, that there is a surplus of \$1,300,000, how can it be true that to hand over \$250,000 of that would bankrupt the province? It is the duty of the government to realize the financial position of the municipalities of British Columbia, and if they reject this proposition we ask them to provide an alternative solution. (Applause.) The government has imposed additional duties on municipalities, notably with regard to schools, but has not provided for a corresponding increase of revenue.

**The Capital's Streets.**  
I would ask the finance minister or the commissioner of lands and works to get information from any municipalities as to the financial condition they are in. Right here in Victoria they are asking for money to beautify the city. The streets in this city are a disgrace to the capital of the province of British Columbia. You will hear people declare that they have heard of a place where they have seen the condition of the streets here that it must rain all the time because on the streets they were up to their knees in mud. Is it not a fact that if any municipality wants to make permanent improvements they have to borrow money to do it? If you investigate you will find that not five per cent of such works can be done out of the ordinary revenue of the current year. (Hear, hear.) If this condition is true, and I believe it is, how can the government escape its plain duty of providing more adequate revenue for municipalities? Hand them the taxes and give them the power to improve the streets by the means of improving these conditions.

Mr. Davey thought the farmer has abundant cause for thanksgiving and that he is getting good prices. The crops last year were not full and prices were low, but I suppose the farmer should be thankful that he has as good as he has and sufficient to meet the necessities he is subject to. Another cause of thankfulness was that the fire in the Ferns district, a most destructive fire took place it was not attended with greater loss of life, and that there is to-day a finer town springing up.

**Fraudulent Pre-emptions.**  
The speaker told us that there had been 1,000 pre-emption notices taken up last year. This is no evidence as to the number of bona fide settlers. I know of one enterprising company which issued a prospectus asking people to file pre-emptions and hand them over to it. The land laws are insufficient to meet this case. Declarations of residence and improvement were made by the settler, and the government expended not a day's residence pay. In it is the duty of the government to see that the law is fulfilled in regard to these pre-emptions. There is ground to believe that a considerable proportion of these pre-emptions are fraudulent, that they are not recorded for settlement, but to obtain land and offer it to other speculators at rising prices. The speaker spoke of a government reserve until lands were surveyed, and he is evidently sincere when he thinks that policy tends to settlement. But he should remember that all lands not open to settlement are open to the speculator to take. Then when the government has decided that a survey shall be made of a certain section and that pending it there shall be no lands sold, there is no time lost before the survey gets under way. Take the case of the Nechaco valley and ask the chief commissioner how much of the land surveyed there has been purchased since the survey was completed on the ground at all. What is the use of reserving the land after it has been staked? Mr. Davey followed up by what I believe to have been an inspired guess, that the government would encourage actual settlement the practice has been adopted of reserving all sections selected for survey against entry, save by pre-emption, pending completion of the survey. The result is that these lands are absolutely reserved for the settler.

**Enriched by Settlers.**  
That settler is a man of small means. If he were a man of considerable means he would locate in a well-settled district where he could have the comfort he is used to. The man of small means waits till the survey is completed and then finds that one-third is reserved for the settler, that for every acre he improves for himself he improves two for the speculator. Suppose the 4,000 pre-emptions were in one block there would be 250,000 acres occupied by actual settlers, as against 760,000 acres of wild lands, or in the proportion of three to one. How long are we to have this condition in the province? Is it British Columbia? How long is the settler, lured by the descriptions of the glorious country and climate advertised and paid for by the province, and travelling hundreds of miles to get to the land, to find that the country is blanketed by the stakes of the speculator?

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