

20TH NOVEMBER, 1891.

PRESENT:—

HIS EXCELLENCY THE ACTING GOVERNOR, Major-General G. DIGBY BARKER, C.B.

Hon. W. M. GOODMAN, Acting Colonial Secretary.

Hon. A. J. LEACH, Acting Attorney-General.

Hon. J. H. STEWART-LOCKHART, Registrar-General.

Hon. N. G. MITCHELL-INNES, Colonial Treasurer.

Hon. F. A. COOPER, Acting Surveyor-General.

Hon. W. C. H. HASTINGS, Acting Harbour Master.

Hon. C. P. CHATER.

Hon. Ho KAI.

MINUTES.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

ILLNESS OF THE CLERK OF COUNCILS.

HIS EXCELLENCY—I should perhaps mention that owing to the indisposition of Mr. Thompson, the Clerk of Councils, Mr. May has been requested to act for him to-day and has taken the necessary oaths in the presence of the Acting Colonial Secretary.

MR. WHITEHEAD'S QUESTIONS.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—Certain questions were put down by the Hon. Mr. Whitehead, but as the hon. member is not here I will postpone answering them until the hon. member is here to ask them for himself.

THE APPROPRIATION BILL, 1891.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—I beg to move the

second reading of the Appropriation Bill, 1891. I am sorry to see so few unofficial members present, and possibly under the circumstances it will not be advisable to go beyond the second reading, and refer the Bill to the Finance Committee. I do not intend therefore to go further with the Bill to-day than simply to move the second reading. I should like to say a few words upon the Bill. As I think I stated before, this Bill is a further Appropriation Bill. The Bill read last time was the Appropriation Bill for next year. In accordance with the custom in vogue the Appropriation Bill of 1890 included everything except public works extraordinary. They never were included in the Appropriation Bill for the next year. However, in the Bill brought before the Council last they will be found put in, so that the Council are asked to vote the money for public works extraordinary before the money is expended. The Secretary of State has ordered that this year the public works extraordinary shall be put in the Bill and provision made for the expenditure in this year instead of leaving them as in the ordinary course for a supplementary Bill next year after what has been spent has been ascertained, and bringing in a Supplementary Bill to legalise the expenditure. It is my duty now to bring forward the present Bill, which I call the further Appropriation Bill, 1891. There are a list of public works put down in the first clause to which I invite the attention of hon. members. It will be observed that there are no new works among those inserted without the previous sanction of Council. Every endeavour has been made to comply with the suggestion made by the committee last year in their long memorandum on public works, which will be found on page 110 of local Hansard. They recommended amongst other things as follows:—  
"We further recommend that before sanctioning further  
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works those already authorised—the many important public works already commenced—should be pushed on to completion." Hon. members will see by the Bill that that is what has been endeavoured to be done. These works were undertaken some time ago and we are now pushing on all such works rather than undertaking new works. The only works that are included in this Bill that are new have all been covered by financial minutes in Council. The new works, that is those not included in the list of extraordinary public works last year and discussed by Council, are as follows:—The repairs to St. John's Cathedral, the rebuilding of the Praya wall at Yaumati, and the erection of a vaccine institute. All these as I have said before are covered by financial minutes. These new works are works of special urgency. The repairs to St. John's Cathedral were authorised by the Secretary of State, who said that the Cathedral must be put in proper repair before it was handed over. The wall at Yaumati was destroyed by a gale and its reconstruction was necessary to prevent further damage. The Vaccine Institute was recommended very strongly by the Sanitary Board and you have already in a financial minute recommended the Government to proceed with the work at once. In the ordinary course instead of my bringing forward this Bill now nothing would have been done till next year, when these items would have been included in the supplementary estimates. As it is this Bill has had to be brought forward, and I now have the honour to move that it be read a second time and afterwards referred to the Finance Committee.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded.

Hon. C. P. CHATER—Before proceeding with the work before us, I think it my duty, your Excellency, to point out that of five unofficial members there are present only two. Your Excellency is no doubt aware that the senior unofficial member has written into the Government asking for a postponement of this meeting. He stated in his letter that it would be impossible for him to be present here to-day, because he had to attend three separate meetings of various companies of which he was either the Chairman or a director. In the same letter he informed your Excellency that it would be very inconvenient for the member who represents the Chamber of Commerce to be present and also very inconvenient for me. As far as I am concerned I am present here and prepared to go on with any work before us and I think my hon. friend opposite (Hon. Ho Kai) is also desirous of seeing the work progress. At the same time I would ask your Excellency to postpone the consideration of the Appropriation Bills and also the Merchant Shipping Bill. The hon. member who represents the Chamber of Commerce and who I believe, has been instructed by the Chamber to bring forward various amendments to the Bill is not present, and as he has informed me that it would be almost impossible for him to be here without actually neglecting his duty to the Bank he represents, under the circumstances as he is in a far better position to deal with these amendments than myself, I only

returned to the Colony a few days ago, I ask that consideration of the Bill may be postponed. As far as the Appropriation Bills are concerned it would be almost useless to go on without the full number of unofficial members present as the representatives of the public, appointed by them to look after the interests and welfare of those who contribute to the revenues of the Colony. Under the circumstances I would request your Excellency to postpone the Merchant Shipping bill, with regard to which I may say I quite agree with the opinion of the hon. member who represents the Chamber of Commerce that the shipping of Hongkong is really the life blood of the Colony. If we legislate hastily to-day we might do certain harm, keep probably some of the vessels away from the harbour, and thereby injure the interests and welfare of the place very materially. Under these circumstances I would ask your Excellency to postpone the consideration of the Merchant Shipping Bill and the Appropriation Bills.

HIS EXCELLENCY—It was not the intention to proceed further than the second reading of this Bill to-day in order that on the next occasion it may be considered in Committee. The works referred to in the Bill are to a great extent completed, and there can hardly be any difference of opinion about them now. As you have just been informed by the Acting Colonial Secretary the only items not already passed with the estimates are those which have been the subject of separate minutes in this Council. It is almost a more matter of form therefore passing the Bill and it will enable us to make a little progress with the work we have before us.

Hon. C. P. CHATER—I am quite agreeable to the second reading of the Bill, but I trust we shall not go into committee on it to-day or that we shall go into Committee on the Merchant Shipping Bill

The Bill was read a second time and referred to the Finance Committee.

HIS EXCELLENCY—With regard to what has just been said by the Hon. Mr. Chater, I do not propose, after what has been said, and seeing that two unofficial members are absent, to proceed this afternoon with the Merchant Shipping Bill, but I must say that I do feel that there is an opposition to making any progress with this Bill which I regret. I must recall to hon. members' memory what I have to some extent already stated on a previous occasion, that knowing this Bill was of very great importance and bearing in mind that the shipping interest, as has been said, is the life - blood of the colony,

I purposely had the second reading of this Bill delayed. It was read a first time three weeks before the vacation and special notice was given that during the seven or eight weeks of our vacation there would be time for those interested in the Bill to consider it, in order that we might be prepared to proceed with it on our reassembling, which took place at a later date even than we had at first anticipated. I was then met with the proposal that the Bill should not be proceeded with. It appeared that the Chamber of Commerce, who considered this Bill one affecting the life-blood of the colony, had not given any attention to it, and they therefore were not prepared to express their views on it. I think that was a matter of very great regret. I gave in and gave every possible latitude. I put off consideration of it from week to week until we had been actually sitting for, I think, four weeks. At last we went into committee on it. Twice if not three times I pointed out the necessity of having a second meeting during the week. My wishes were resisted on each occasion. Last week, in order that I might inconvenience hon. members as little as possible, I put it to them to name a day for the second meeting. No day that would satisfy was named by them, but a suggestion was made that we should meet one hour earlier last Monday. I agreed to that and we made a little progress in that extra hour, the first we had made. But one hour is not sufficient time. Christmas is drawing near, the days are closing in, and we must get the business before us completed. I then adjourned the Council until to-day (Friday), having purposely named Friday knowing there was a certain inconvenience attached to Thursday as regards one hon. member particularly interested whom I was desirous not to incommode more than I could help. Not one word was said at that moment against the adjournment to Friday; I was not told it was specially inconvenient for any one. If it was inconvenient I might have expected them to mention it then, and had I been informed then by those who felt it inconvenient, I should have asked them to name another day this week. What happened? Why, that happened which I am sorry to say happens continually. At the last moment, that is to say in the middle of Thursday, I received a letter from the hon. the senior unofficial member stating that it was very inconvenient for him and two other unofficial members to attend. Had that letter been sent to me on Tuesday, I could have fixed Thursday. I know the mail went on Wednesday this week, and I am most anxious to make the meetings as convenient as possible. After all this is considered I think one can hardly be wrong in supposing there is a resistance to this bill being considered. However, I do not wish to proceed with it to-day in the absence of those two hon. members. I must have another meeting this week, and there is only one day left. Saturday afternoon is an afternoon when, I believe, there are no committee meetings.

Most of the community probably take it for relaxation, but members of the Government have very little of that. I ask you therefore to meet tomorrow afternoon, and I adjourn the Council till then.

Hon. C. P. CHATER—With your permission, your Excellency, I should like to add a few remarks before the Council adjourns. I must say I regret to have heard your Excellency's remarks with regard to opposition on the part of hon. members towards the progress of this Bill or any other bill before the Council. As far as I am concerned I can assure your Excellency there is no such intention whatever, and I trust I never shall have any such intention. We are all here to work together as best we can for the interests of the colony, and I am sure we all feel it our duty to join together in doing our best for the good of the place we are in. There may have been circumstances connected with this Bill which may have caused the feeling that there is some opposition against it, but I feel sure that so far as the unofficial members are concerned they themselves would inform your Excellency that there is no such intention with regard to either of the two bills before us, which have taken some time and are very important ones. As regards the Merchant Shipping Bill the representative of the Chamber of Commerce has had his instructions and, as I pointed out in my opening address to your Excellency, until he is present here I think it would be almost a mistake to go into Committee on the Bill. I trust your Excellency will accept my assurance that there is no such intention as you alluded to, certainly on my part nor on the part of the other unofficial members. As regards the adjournment I fear, Sir, that we are going from the frying-pan into the fire. I won't go quite so far as that, but as your Excellency said Saturday afternoon is an afternoon of relaxation after a hard week's work. I may say for myself I shall be present to give any assistance I can on the work before us, if your Excellency insists on calling a meeting for Saturday afternoon, but I feel sure that other members have probably made arrangements with friends to go away to Macao for a little change or to go away shooting or have made other arrangements for relaxation, and if your Excellency would fix Monday afternoon I am sure it that would be much more suitable.

HIS EXCELLENCY—I quite acquit the hon. member who has just spoken of any intention on his part of opposition to legislation in any way. In what I said I had not the slightest intention of applying it to him in any way. I quite feel that in his suggestion as to the adjournment he has only been expressing what he feels due to the other hon. members. I acquit him of any intention to cause unnecessary delay and I quite see with him that in the absence of other hon. members it would be undesirable to

go on with the bill. I am also very pleased to hear from him that I may be wrong in my ideas with regard to the feelings of other members, but I think he will agree with me that the circumstances which I have narrated go very far to make it exceedingly difficult for one to see how the case could be otherwise than I have surmised. With regard to to-morrow afternoon I will ask the hon. member if the morning will suit better. We shall meet on Monday at two o'clock in any case. The days are closing early now and we must have our meetings at two o'clock. We must have another meeting very speedily and I should like to have it before Monday. As Saturday afternoon is looked upon as an afternoon of recreation I am quite prepared to have a meeting for two hours in the morning, if that will meet the convenience of hon. members.

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Hon. C. P. CHATER—I think the morning would suit considerably better than the afternoon.

HIS EXCELLENCY—I would further ask what hour would be likely to be least inconvenient?

Hon. C. P. CHATER—I think if it is necessary to have two hours, from eleven o'clock to one would be the most suitable.

HIS EXCELLENCY—Very well, then, we will adjourn till to-morning at eleven o'clock.

The Council then adjo

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