

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL No. 24.

WEDNESDAY, 14TH APRIL, 1886.

PRESENT:

HIS EXCELLENCY WILLIAM HENRY MARSH, C.M.G.,
Administering the Government in the absence of His Excellency SIR GEORGE FERGUSON BOWEN, G.C.M.G.
His Honour the Chief Justice, (SIR GEORGE PHILLIPPO, Knt.)
The Honourable the Acting Colonial Secretary, (FREDERICK STEWART, LL.D.)
„ the Acting Attorney General, (EDWARD JAMES ACKROYD.)
„ the Colonial Treasurer, (ALFRED LISTER.)
„ the Surveyor General, (JOHN MACNEILE PRICE.)
„ PHINEAS RYRIE.
„ WILLIAM KESWICK.
„ WONG SHING.

ABSENT:

The Honourable the Attorney General, (EDWARD LOUGHLIN O'MALLEY,) on leave.
„ THOMAS JACKSON (on leave).
„ FREDERICK DAVID SASSOON (on leave).

The Council met pursuant to adjournment.

The Minutes of the last Meeting, held on the 7th instant, were read and confirmed.

PAPERS.—The Acting Colonial Secretary, by direction of His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, laid on the table the following papers:—

- (a.) Annual Weather Report of the Director of the Observatory, for 1885. (No. 25.)
- (b.) Report of the Director of the Observatory on Five-day Means of the principal Meteorological Elements, for 1885. (No. 26.)
- (c.) Report of the Acting Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department, for 1885. (No. 27.)

VOTES PASSED BY THE FINANCE COMMITTEE.—The Acting Colonial Secretary moved the following Votes passed by the Finance Committee, and laid upon the table, by direction of His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, the Minutes of Proceedings of the Committee in connection therewith:—

(*Finance Committee, 7th April, 1886.*)

PAYMENTS IN EXCESS OF THE ESTIMATES FOR 1886.

ESTABLISHMENTS.

Observatory.

C.S.O. 740 of 1886.	Salary of an additional Chinese Clerk, at \$40 per month, 8 months,	\$ 320.00
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SERVICES EXCLUSIVE OF ESTABLISHMENTS.

Works and Buildings.

C.S.O. 678 of 1886.	General repairs to Mountain Lodge at Victoria Peak,	\$ 1,386.00
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The Colonial Treasurer seconded.

Question—put and passed.

BILL ENTITLED THE STAMP ORDINANCE, 1886.—REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE.—The Colonial Treasurer read the following Report of the Special Committee on this Bill:—

Report of the Special Committee of the Legislative Council appointed to consider a Bill entitled the Stamp Ordinance, 1886.

The Special Committee appointed to report on the draft amended Stamp Ordinance, on going carefully into the probable expenditure of the Colony, are of opinion that no urgency exists for additional taxation at this time, and they recommend that the consideration of increase to the Revenue be postponed until funds are actually needed, when, should unforeseen claims be made upon the Treasury on account of Typhoons or other local causes, the Legislative Council might be called upon to sanction an increase in the Stamp Duties, of which in principle it has approved.

Council Chamber, Hongkong, 7th April, 1886.

The Treasurer then addressed the Council and concluded by stating that he proposed that the Bill should be proceeded with, the duties being kept practically as they are in the present Ordinances with some amendments of detail and consolidation.

The Officer Administering the Government addressed the Council as follows:—

After hearing the report of the Special Committee on the proposed increase of the Stamp Duties and the explanation given by the Treasurer, I beg to announce to the Council that it is not my intention to proceed with this Ordinance as a measure for increasing the taxation, at least during the present Session.

It will be convenient perhaps if I recapitulate for the information of the Council what has been done with respect to this question of the imposition of additional Stamp duties.

I laid on this table as far back as the 17th February last a Despatch from the Secretary of State together with a Minute of my own asking the Council to vote an additional sum of £60,000 for the Military defences of the Colony. The despatch and minute were referred in due course to the Finance Committee who had to consider at the same time what means were to be devised for meeting the interest and sinking fund on the loan which it was necessary to raise to provide for this as well as other extraordinary expenditure. The resolution of the Finance Committee which was afterwards adopted unanimously by the Council was to the effect that "the best means of doing so would chiefly be by an increase of Stamp duty." A Special Committee of Council was then appointed to consider in detail what increases should be made in a draft Stamp Bill which was introduced and read a first time.

Since, however, the question was first raised the accounts of Revenue and Expenditure of the past year have been closed and laid before the Council. The accounts of receipts during the first quarter of the present year have also been made up. The Special Committee to which the Draft Stamp Bill had been referred has, after carefully considering the financial statements submitted to it, come to the conclusion that in view of the prospects of expanding trade and Revenue there is no immediate necessity for imposing additional taxation, and as it is clear to me that the surplus revenue of the present year will be more than sufficient to meet the interest and sinking fund on the portion of the loan which it will be necessary to borrow this year, I beg to announce to the Council that I do not intend to proceed any further this Session with the Stamp Bill as a measure for imposing additional taxation. There are however a few small amendments to the Stamp Ordinance passed last year which experience has shown to be necessary and advantage will be taken of the circumstance that a draft Stamp Act is now before the Council to introduce these amendments.

When Sir GEORGE BOWEN announced to this Council on 18th November last that he did not intend to proceed further at that moment with the Spirit Farm Bill he stated that it "was confidently hoped that the progressive development of our commerce now relieved from the depression caused by the recent hostilities in this part of the world will of itself lead to a growing extension of the public Revenue." It is most satisfactory to see signs that this anticipation will in all probability be realized. An opinion was expressed on the same occasion by one of the unofficial members "that the ordinary Revenue which we shall receive will be sufficient to meet all calls made upon it." Whether this opinion will prove a correct one it is of course impossible at present to foresee. I believe myself that at some future date extra taxation will become absolutely necessary.

The Treasurer then gave notice that at the next meeting of Council he would move the second reading of this Bill, the Schedule to be substituted by the one now in force.

BILLS READ A SECOND TIME.—On the motion of the Acting Attorney General, seconded by the Acting Colonial Secretary, the following Bills were read a second time:—

- (a.) A Bill entitled *The Loan Ordinance, 1886.*
- (b.) A Bill entitled *The Peace Preservation Ordinance, 1886.*

BILL READ A THIRD TIME, AND PASSED.—On the motion of the Acting Attorney General, seconded by the Acting Colonial Secretary, the Bill entitled *An Ordinance for the Relief of Widows and Children of Intestates where the personal estate is of small value*, was read a third time.

Question put—that this Bill do pass.

Bill passed.

BILL ENTITLED AN ORDINANCE TO CONSOLIDATE AND AMEND THE LAW FOR PREVENTING FRAUDS UPON CREDITORS BY SECRET BILLS OF SALE OF PERSONAL CHATTELS.—COMMITTED.—On the motion of the Acting Attorney General, seconded by the Acting Colonial Secretary, the Council went into Committee on this Bill.

Bill reported without amendment.

The Acting Attorney General gave notice that at the next meeting of Council he would move the third reading of this Bill.

POSTPONEMENT OF THE OTHER ORDERS OF THE DAY.—On the motion of the Acting Attorney General, the other Orders of the Day were postponed.

ADJOURNMENT.—The Council then adjourned to Wednesday, the 21st instant, at 4 P.M.

W. H. MARSH,
Administering the Government.

Read and confirmed, this 21st day of April, 1886.

ARATHOON SETH,
Clerk of Councils.