**SEED WHEAT BILL 1900**

**House of Assembly, 1 November 1900, pages 791-2**

Second reading

**The TREASURER** said that in 1896 members were impressed with a sense of the burdens of some of our agriculturists, and the desire as landlords to go to the assistance of their tenants led them to pass a measure providing for advances of seed wheat to various persons. Unfortunately they had had bad seasons ever since, and still more unfortunate was the fact that this year, when they had hoped that the tide had turned, and that the agriculturists had begun to see better days again, the crops in many of the outside districts were almost an utter failure. He was sorry that the legislation required year by year with a view to extending the time for the repayment of advances could not be dispensed with this year. A short time ago a deputation waited upon him and represented the condition of affairs in many parts of the north and north-east, and in some other portions of the colony, and as he heard the members of that deputation speak he was very much impressed with the pluck and enterprise shown by our settlers, who after repeated failures had put their crops in again and again. These people had been engaged in a vain struggle against Nature during the last five years, and. he only wished they could be taken bodily off the lands they now occupied and placed in some more favored locality. Unfortunately that could not be done. One thing, however, that Parliament could do was to give them a further time for repaying their advances, and when a good season did come he was satisfied that many of them would use the proceeds of that season to clear out from where they were at present, and settle in some more moist locality. The settlers did not ask for more seed wheat, but for an extension of the time for repaying the amounts due by them. From 1896 up to the present time the Government had advanced £89,375 3/5 to district councils, and to farmers outside district councils they had advanced £5,059 19/10, making a total of £94,435 3/3. Of these sums district councils had repaid £19,138 6/, and outside farmers £117 8/9, leaving a balance due in respect of the former of £70,236 17/5, and of the latter of £4,942 11/1. There was also a liability on account of interest. District councils had paid £6,121 19/6 out of £9,824 9/3 accrued, leaving £3,702 9/9 still due, and outside farmers had reduced the Interest owing by them by £30 15/, leaving £547 18/1 still outstanding. The total amount of interest and principal outstanding was £79,429 16/4. He was glad to say that while a few farmers would like to see the whole debt wiped out, the great majority of them stood like men to their engagements, and were still determined to pay off as soon as they can the obligations that rest upon them. He believed the public were under a debt of great magnitude to the local bodies for the care with which they had administered the matter from the beginning. The Government did not propose to make any provision for further advances, but they asked that the district councils might be empowered to extend the time for the repayment of these sums as they became due. The plan of the Bill was not to extend the time for everybody indiscriminately, because there were some who had obtained advances who could now repay, more or less. It was therefore provided in clause 2 that “'Whenever a district council is satisfied that serious hardship would be inflicted by requiring payment at the due date of any moneys payable in respect of seed wheat supplied pursuant to the Seed Wheat Acts, such council may extend the time for the payment of such moneys. The extension of time granted may provide for the repayment of the moneys payable, with the interest thereon, in not more than five equal annual payments, the first of which is to become due not more than one year from the date of the extension being granted, and a similar payment to become due on the same date in each year thereafter until the whole o£ the moneys payable have been paid. This meant that the district councils would consider each case on its merits, and allow time for repayments accordingly, in whatever number of years, not exceeding five they might consider proper. He was sure the suffering farmers had the sympathy of every member of the House, and he hoped the Bill would pass as speedily as possible.

Mr. BURGOYNE regretted the necessity of this Bill, owing to the failure which had occurred in some districts in succession to five previous disappointments. This circumstance had rendered repayments in the future not impossible, but less easy. It struck ;him that the maximum period of five ears might in some cases be too short, and he believed in some instances the district councils might find it advisable to extend it to seven years. He felt obliged to the Treasurer for the able manner in which he had dealt with a very difficult question.

Mr. PRICE supported the Bill, as the proper thing to do. Their admiration must be extended to these men Who have struggled along and exhibited such British pluck. (Mr. Grainger—“And stupidity.”) Well, there was hardly any difference between the two. These men had year after year resolved to do the best they could. It was certain that they were the sort of people who like to pay their debts, and not the sort who go into the Insolvency Court to get whitewashed. They wanted to pay their way, and should be given time to do it.

The Bill was read a second time.