

(No. 28.)



1877.

SESSION II.

TASMANIA.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

DUPLICATE CABLE CONFERENCE.

CORRESPONDENCE AND INSTRUCTIONS.

Laid upon the Table by the Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed, April 24, 1877.



Victoria,
Chief Secretary's Office, Melbourne, 8th December, 1876.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to inform you that my colleague the Postmaster-General of Victoria is desirous that a Conference should be held either in Melbourne or Hobart Town, about the latter end of January, for the purpose of considering the best means of securing more perfect telegraphic communication with England than exists at present. A similar letter inviting them to take part in the Conference has been forwarded to the Governments of all the Australian colonies as well as to that of New Zealand. I should feel obliged if you would forward me by telegram an intimation as to whether your Government will send a representative to assist in considering the question.

I have, &c.

(Signed) JOHN S. MACPHERSON.

The Honorable the Colonial Secretary, Tasmania.

REFERRED to the Hon. the Colonial Treasurer with the request that he will enable the Colonial Secretary to reply to this letter.

B. TRAVERS SOLLY.
14th December, 1876.

I AM of opinion that the Colonial Treasurer should attend on behalf of the Tasmanian Government, say in January, at Sydney.

CHARLES MEREDITH.
14. 12. 76.

Hon. Colonial Secretary.

As explained to me by Mr. Coote yesterday, the chief point for the Conference to determine is the point of departure from Australia. Whether from the Gulf of Carpentaria, in Queensland, or from Perth, in Western Australia, Sydney presents a central point to consider and decide this question.—C. M.

TELEGRAM to the effect that this Government will send a representative to assist in considering the question at a Conference in Melbourne.

T. REIBEY.
18th December, 1876.

Tasmania,
Colonial Secretary's Office, 14th December, 1876.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8th instant, informing me that your colleague the Postmaster-General of Victoria is desirous that a Conference should be held either in Melbourne or Hobart Town, about the latter end of January, for the purpose of considering the best means of securing more perfect telegraphic communication with England than exists at present.

I have, &c.

(Signed) CHARLES MEREDITH,
(For Colonial Secretary, absent.)

The Hon. the Chief Secretary, Victoria.

By ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH:

THIS Government will send representative to Telegraph Conference in Melbourne. Please name proposed date.

(Signed) THOS. REIBEY.
18th December, 1876.

The Hon. the Chief Secretary, Melbourne.

Tasmania,
Colonial Secretary's Office, 18th December, 1876.

SIR,

REFERRING to your letter of the 8th, and my reply of the 14th instant, on the subject of a Conference for the purpose of considering the best means of securing more perfect telegraphic communication with England than exists at present, I have the honor to inform you that I, this day, forwarded the following telegram to your address:—

“This Government will send representative to Telegraphic Conference in Melbourne. Please name proposed date.”

I ave, &c.

(Signed) B. TRAVERS SOLLY,
(For Colonial Secretary, absent.)

The Hon. the Chief Secretary, Victoria.

BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.

Melbourne, 23. 12. 76.

NEW SOUTH WALES suggests that Telegraph Conference be held at Sydney. We have no objection if other colonies consent. Do you agree?

Chief Secretary, Melbourne.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Tasmania.

COPY OF REPLY.

If the time fixed for Conference permits, Tasmania will send a representative to Sydney.

THOS. REIBEY.
28th December, 1876.

BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.

Sydney, 29. 12. 76.

TWENTY-SECOND (22nd) proximo proposed for opening of Conference respecting duplicate cable. Will it suit you?

WM. GOODMAN, *Colonial Secretary's Office.*

Colonial Secretary.

BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.

Your telegram of 29th ultimo received by me on the 2nd instant, being absent from town. Will write by post concerning the Conference.

(Signed) THOS. REIBEY, *Colonial Secretary.*
5th January, 1877.

The Honorable the Colonial Secretary, Sydney.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hobart Town, 12th January, 1877.

MEMO.

THE Honorable James Whyte having signified his consent to act as Delegate for this Colony at the Conference to be held in Sydney towards the latter end of this month, upon the subject of telegraphic communication with England, the Colonial Secretary forwards herewith all papers now in his office bearing on the subject, and requests the Honorable the Colonial Treasurer will notify to Mr. Whyte his appointment as soon as it is made by the Governor in Council. In the meantime Mr. Whyte would be glad to peruse all documents in the possession of the Government in any way relating to the questions to be considered by the Conference.

THOS. REIBEY.

The Honorable the Colonial Treasurer.

EXECUTIVE MINUTE PAPER.

Colonial Treasury, 15th January, 1877.

THE Colonial Treasurer submits that the Honorable James Whyte be appointed and accredited by His Excellency Frederick Aloysius Weld, Esquire, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Colony of Tasmania and its Dependencies, as a Delegate from Tasmania to the Intercolonial Conference to be held at Sydney, during the month of January instant, for the purpose of considering the best means of securing more perfect telegraphic communication with England than exists at present.

CHARLES MEREDITH, *Colonial Treasurer.*

THE Governor in Council approves.

E. C. NOWELL,
15. 1. 77.

The Hon. the Colonial Treasurer.

Tasmania,
Colonial Treasury, Hobart Town, 13th January, 1877.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor of informing you that His Excellency Frederick Aloysius Weld, Esquire, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Colony of Tasmania and its Dependencies, has, with the advice of His Executive Council, been pleased to appoint and accredit you as a Delegate from Tasmania to the Intercolonial Conference to be held in Sydney during the month of January instant, for the purpose of considering the best means of securing more perfect telegraphic communication with England than exists at present.

The important matters to be considered in reference to Cable communication with Europe may be divided into three parts :—

1st. The point of departure from Australia.—I am aware you will have conflicting opinions as to the advantages of the Gulf of Carpentaria as compared with Western Australia, in reference to which I desire to say for your information that when Governor of Western Australia the Governor of Tasmania connected the settled parts of the former Colony with King George's Sound, and commenced the line to connect King George's Sound with Adelaide, being desirous of completing this scheme by opening a direct line from Western Australia to Ceylon or India. In 1874 the Governor was in communication with Siemens Brothers, who offered to lay a line from Western Australia to Madras direct in consideration of a 15 years' monopoly. The Governor would have agreed to this but was obliged to refer to the Colonial Office, and although the consent of the Secretary of State for the Colonies was sent to his successor, Messrs. Siemens were not prepared to undertake the work on those terms. At that time Messrs. Siemens preferred to carry the line to Madras direct rather than to Ceylon : at present I think they are in favour of Ceylon.

The route *viâ* Western Australia has several advantages. It does not touch on foreign territory. Most of the mistakes arise through telegrams written in English being repeated by foreign clerks.

The Dutch Government, I understand, will not allow any other clerks but Dutch to be employed on telegraph stations within their dominions. In case of war it is of the utmost importance to have the line in our own hands, and this would be attained by starting from Western Australia an striking either Ceylon or Madras, avoiding the Cocoa Isles, and laying the cable in deep water. The deeper the water, the longer the life of the cable. King George's Sound should be in easy direct communication ; it is a coaling harbour, and of primary importance to all Australia, and I am informed might easily be rendered defensible.

You will gather from the foregoing that Tasmanian Ministers are of opinion that for the interests of Tasmania, and other more purely political reasons, the most favourable line is the direct one *viâ* Western Australia.

As regards the formation of the line, whether by the Government, the present company, or a new one, I can only say, that most decidedly the Governments of the Australias should only undertake the work by the agency of a company, and pay in proportion to their population. The great advantage to the Colonies in having telegraphic communication with Europe during peace or war can scarcely be overrated ; and it is to be hoped that the united action of the proposed Conference may lead to so desirable a result.

I forward for your perusal the Report of the Intercolonial Conference held in Sydney during the months of January and February, 1873, (Paper No. 2, House of Assembly, 1873,) and desire to draw your attention to the fifth subject discussed, namely, the Telegraph Service. Whether the charges for telegraphic messages are as applicable in 1877 as they were deemed to be in 1873, is a matter that I doubt not will be amply discussed in the present Conference. To one matter I will particularly allude, and that is the great advantage that would be spread over the whole of the Australias by the receipt of a daily message on principal events to the Presses of the various Colonies through their Governments,—the Presses paying in proportion to their extent of circulation.

The third matter is the question of borrowing money.—Assuming the Cable to be laid by a company, the question naturally arises, would not that company obtain a loan on more favourable terms on Governmental guarantees ?

It is impossible to give definite instructions on any of these three points, and in consequence of that uncertainty you will bear in mind that you are not empowered to commit the Government of Tasmania to any line of action, without making that line of action known and receiving an approval of it.

You will not fail to point out to the Delegates assembled the fact of Tasmania having, at her own cost, caused one telegraphic cable to be laid from Low Heads to Cape Schanck, and urging the claims of Tasmania as proportionate with those of South Australia in her great work in constructing the line from Adelaide to Port Darwin.

The connecting line between the continent of Australia and Tasmania is of importance to residents in Australia, as in a great measure enabling them to obtain direct communication with the provinces in which their properties and businesses are situate, whilst they, during the hot months of summer, are invigorating themselves by enjoyment of the salubrious air of this Island.

To advance the general welfare of Tasmania is the immediate object of the Government, who confidently entertain an expectation that a similar sentiment animates yourself, and will guide your conduct throughout.

The *Gazette* containing the notice of your official appointment is herewith enclosed.

I have, &c.

(Signed) CHARLES MEREDITH.

The Hon. JAMES WHYTE, *Hobart Town.*

Sydney, New South Wales, 22nd January, 1877

MY DEAR SIR,

TO-DAY I have sent a telegram enquiring if the Cable Company have any claims on the Tasmanian Government beyond the guarantee of interest on £4200 so long as the Cable is in working condition. Also requesting you to furnish me with the financial position of the Cable during the last five years.

Be good enough to give it me short by telegram, and more fully by the first post.

On reading your instructions, after leaving Tasmania, it appeared to me that they are too restrictive, and I fancied more so than you could have intended, as you express a very decided preference for a particular route, viz.—the western one direct to Ceylon; and yet, if I am strictly to regulate my action by the following restriction contained in your letter of instructions, I could not vote in favour of that route, nor, in fact, could I vote at all without reference to Tasmania.

The restriction I refer to is as follows:—"It is impossible to give definite instructions on any of these points, and in consequence of that uncertainty you will bear in mind that you are not empowered to commit the Government of Tasmania to any line of action, without making that line of action known, and receiving an approval of it."

This I feel certain could not be your intention, inasmuch as the authorisation of me to attend a Conference without the power of recording my vote on any question before it would render my presence there a mere nullity.

According to my view of the position, nothing that I can do or say at the Conference can bind the Government of Tasmania until it is confirmed and approved of by them.

On considering the whole question, as far as Tasmania is concerned, it appears to me that unless the other Colonies are prepared to accept our liability on the Bass's Straits Cable, and also the liability of New Zealand and New South Wales on the Cable between these Colonies, as part of the Submarine Cable liability of the contracting Colonies to be equally borne by each Colony in proportion to population, we have nothing to gain by entering into any further Submarine Cable liability at present.

If the other Colonies, in a national spirit, will consent to sink their local predilections in order to attain united action on such an important question as that of telegraphic communication with Europe and the East, and in furtherance of that object will assent to the principle I have indicated, then I think we should join them in obtaining duplicate telegraphic communication.

But if they will not agree to merge all the submarine liabilities into one, with an equitable distribution of the annual cost of the same in proportion to population, I am of opinion that the Tasmanian Government is not called upon to incur or would be justified in incurring any further Submarine Cable or other outside telegraphic outlay at the present time.

If the Tasmanian Government approves of this view of the subject, I will bring it formally before the Conference. If it is assented to it will be a desirable point gained in a national intercolonial point of view, and moreover will be advantageous to Tasmania financially, probably to the extent of about £1000 per annum.

The guarantee of New South Wales and New Zealand on the Cable between those Colonies is £10,000 per annum for 10 years,—£2500 per annum for New South Wales, and £7500 per annum for New Zealand.

As our guarantee on the Bass's Straits Cable is in perpetuity, probably we should be expected to accept a larger proportionate liability than the other Colonies.

The Conference is expected to meet on the 25th, but as the next day is a holiday the probability is that little more than formal work will be done this week.

I remain,
My dear Sir,
Yours very truly,

JAMES WHYTE.

The Hon. CHARLES MEREDITH, Colonial Treasurer, Tasmania.

Hon. JAMES WHYTE, Albert Hotel, Sydney.

IN reply to letter of 22nd ult., in conformity with your propositions contained in that letter, you are untrammelled as to route.

CHARLES MEREDITH.
Hobart, January 26, 1877.

Melbourne, 9th February, 1877.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to inform you that I arrived here last night on my return from Sydney.

The Conference closed on the 2nd instant, and as no vessel offered for Tasmania direct until the 13th, I thought it advisable to return *via* Melbourne.

I send herewith a copy of the Proceedings of the Conference for the information of His Excellency the Governor and the Government.

I regret having to inform you that the hopes I entertained, and conveyed to you by Telegram, that the proceedings of the Conference promised a favourable consideration of Tasmanian interests with reference to the future liability on the Submarine Cable between Victoria and Tasmania, have not been realised in the subsequent proceedings.

You will observe from these proceedings, page 9, a Notice of Motion, No. 3, was given by the Treasurer of New South Wales to the following effect; viz.—

“That the loss (if any) on Colonial lines, to connect the cables with the main telegraphic systems, should in like manner be borne by all the Colonies concerned.”

All the Members of the Conference at first appeared to favour the principle contained in the above-mentioned Resolution, excepting the Victorian Delegates, who expressed themselves adverse to it, and condemned it as importing an embarrassing subject into the proceedings.

This view of the subject I endeavoured to combat, by pointing out that acting equitably and justly ought not to be a cause of embarrassment when dealing with such an important question in a national point of view, or words to that effect.

The discussion on the question of route, through some irregularity in the course of business, took precedence of the disposal of No. 3 Resolution.

On the question of route wide differences of opinion existed, and a great want of precise and definite information,—of a nature absolutely essential to enable members of the Conference to come to a satisfactory decision as to which route would be the best for the interests of all the Colonies,—was so apparent to all, that a unanimous conclusion was arrived at in favour of adopting the resolutions contained in paragraph 4 of the Report proposed by the New Zealand Delegate.

Seeing clearly that anything like unanimity as to route, with the information then before the Conference, was impossible, and that the principle brought forward by New South Wales, providing for the future maintenance of the Tasmanian and New Zealand Cables, had been abandoned in deference to the expressed opinions of the Victorian Delegates, I could see no objection to giving my support to the New Zealand proposition, in favour of obtaining further and more definite information before deciding upon the question of route.

The moment I perceived that the equitable principle enunciated in the New South Wales Notice of Motion No. 3, was to be abandoned, I concluded that, so far as Tasmanian interests were

concerned, my course was to refuse my assent to, or refrain from voting on, any proposition which would involve Tasmania in any further liability for telegraphic communication with Europe at the present time.

I believe I can comprehend the motives which influenced the New South Wales Delegates in abandoning their propositions, Nos. 3 and 4; the first by allowing an amendment, proposed by Victoria,—which entirely altered the operation of the resolution with reference to losses on certain portions of the lines of telegraph communication with Europe,—to be carried, and by withdrawing No. 4 altogether. But while I believe that I can divine the motives which actuated some of the Delegates of the leading Colonies in rejecting the principle contained in Nos. 3 and 4 Notices of Motion, it will I think be better for me to impart my opinions to you at a personal interview than commit them to writing.

I do not even now abandon all hopes of some arrangement being ultimately agreed to by the several Colonies, that the liabilities on all Main Lines of Cable, or other lines communicating with Europe, shall be considered national, and be maintained by all in proportion to population.

This however cannot be again touched, with any hope of success, until New Zealand has ascertained, as I believe she will, that the idea of co-operation and assistance from the United States of America is a delusion. Then, doubtless, New Zealand will fall back upon the Australian Colonies, and join them in whatever line they may adopt.

At present I believe that New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia are in favour of duplicating the Cable on or near the present line from Port Darwin to Singapore. Queensland is strongly in favour of a line from Thursday Island (near Cape York) or Normanton to Singapore, touching at Timor; but if they cannot accomplish this, they would prefer the route from the North West Cape, in Western Australia, either to Ceylon or Singapore.

New Zealand, if she fails in enlisting the United States of America in favour of the American route *via* Fiji and Honolulu, will, I think, be disposed to go with the majority of the Australian Colonies in support of any of the other suggested routes; her own Cable to New South Wales being taken as part of the line. If this should come to pass, then the Tasmanian Cable must also come in as part of the Main Line Telegraphic communication with Europe.

It will not surprise me, however, to see New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, at once enter into a compact for the duplication of the present line from Port Darwin to Singapore; or, probably, only from Singapore to Bangoewangie, with the view of leaving it open, subsequently, to take it either to Cape York or the North West Cape in conjunction with Queensland and New Zealand.

I may inform you, however, that so far as I have been able to ascertain the views of the respective Colonies, as shown during the discussions at the Conference, I believe that the sympathies of all, excepting Queensland and Western Australia, are decidedly in favour of a route which will embrace the overland line of South Australia as part of it.

It was urged at the Conference, by the Delegates of New South Wales and Victoria, that any new route, if adopted by the majority of the Australian Colonies, and the Company carrying out the same being subsidised, must inevitably destroy the present line.

In this view of the subject I must say that I concur, although I refrained from saying so at the Conference; and I think that if a new line throughout is adopted, South Australia will certainly have a very strong claim upon the other Colonies, morally if not legally, to be in some measure reimbursed part, if not the whole, of the annual loss she will thereby sustain.

I will be in Hobart Town in a few days after you receive this letter, when I will do myself the honor of waiting upon you, and afford His Excellency the Governor and the Government any further information that may be desired.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JAMES WHYTE.

The Hon. the Colonial Treasurer, Tasmania.