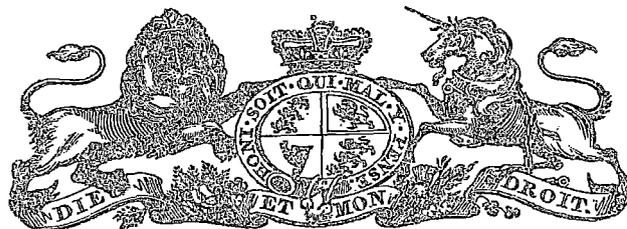


(No. 16.)



1856.

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T A S M A N I A.

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M E M O R A N D U M.

VIEWS AND POLICY OF MR. GREGSON'S ADMINISTRATION.

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Ordered by the Legislative Council to be printed 25 March, 1857.



24th March, 1857.

MEMORANDUM.

1. THE circumstances under which Mr. Gregson replaced Mr. Champ as the Governor's responsible Adviser render it necessary that the first measure to be adopted by the Cabinet should embrace the financial condition of the Colony, and the re-organisation of Departments with a view to reduction.

The Commissioners appointed by the late Government have not yet reported; and, in reply to Mr. Gregson's request for a progress Report, they state that it would be impossible to furnish one of any value at present, but that they see their way clearly to considerable retrenchment. They also inform Mr. Gregson that their Report is likely to prove voluminous. Although the Ministry would have preferred a somewhat differently constituted Commission, had it been their duty to recommend this measure in the first instance, they are nevertheless willing to attach due weight to the suggestions likely to be offered to the Government by the intelligent body of gentlemen who have undertaken this inquiry, and to avail themselves, so far as may be found practicable, of the result of their investigations. But both Mr. Gregson and his colleagues are agreed that it would be inconsistent with their duty to His Excellency and Parliament to allow the absence of a Report from the Commissioners appointed by a previous Administration to interpose any obstacle to the immediate enunciation of the general financial policy of the present Government. At the same time they are prepared to lay the Report, when delivered, before Parliament for its consideration, should it be found to contain well-founded suggestions of retrenchment, differing in character or extent from the reductions contemplated by themselves.

2. The financial policy of the present Ministry is based upon the distinct recognition of the exigencies of the times, and of the almost unanimously expressed wishes of the Constituencies of the Island, as well as of the leading Members of the mercantile bodies in both Hobart Town and Launceston, that Retrenchment should precede additional Taxation. This Council will therefore not be surprised to learn, that it is not the intention of the Ministry to press the "*Customs' Duties Alteration Bill*" through the Legislative Council; and that they contemplate, in lieu of any present measure of increased Taxation, to institute such a thorough retrenchment in the salaries and establishments of the Civil Service of the Colony as shall bring the annual Expenditure on this head within the limits of the ordinary Revenue. They would suspend, moreover, all outlay on Public Works, except (1) those which the Government are bound to proceed with; (2) those the abandonment of which might be attended with loss of public money; (3) those which may be declared indispensably requisite; and lastly, those which may be legitimately considered of a reproductive character.

3. The Expenditure for 1857 sanctioned by the House of Assembly is £335,399. The ordinary Revenue, in the estimated Ways and Means ordered by the Assembly to be printed, amounts to £280,727: but this must be reduced by about £20,000 calculated on the receipt of the new Duties, which it is not the intention of the Ministry to proceed with.

The deficit for the year would consequently amount to (say) £76,000. No account is here taken of the item in the printed Ways and Means, "Loan by Debentures in aid £32,000," sanctioned by a vote of the Assembly. Supposing the Bill required to give this vote effect is passed by the Legislative Council, and the Debentures realised, this deficiency would be reduced to (say) £44,000. Mr. Gregson and his colleagues believe that they will be enabled to meet this deficiency by the measures they are prepared to submit for the adoption of Parliament.

4. The first subject which engaged the attention of the present Ministry was the advisability of relieving the current Revenue as speedily as possible from the burthen of the Public Debt contracted by their predecessors. This they propose to effect by the sale of Waste Lands. No less than 160,000 acres of land adapted for agricultural purposes will be available in August next, by expiry of the annual licences for pastoral purposes; and other lands of a similar character will annually become resumable. At Public Auction, duly advertised in this and the neighbouring Colonies, an average of £2 an acre

may not unreasonably be expected to be realised. With the proceeds of these sales provision would be made for the extinction of the existing Public Debt, and for the compensation of such officials as it may be found necessary to reduce in effecting the re-organisation of the Departments contemplated by the Government. A sum of £320,000 may be expected to be realised from this source by the conclusion of the financial year 1857-8.

5. The enormous expense required for the custody, maintenance, and trial of Imperial Convicts may be reduced, it is thought, on an appeal to the Home Government to continue their previous vote in aid. It is therefore proposed to move in Parliament the adoption of an Address, to be transmitted by the Governor to the Secretary of State for presentation to Her Majesty, praying the British Government to renew for such a period as shall be deemed equitable the original grant of £25,000 made some years ago in aid of Police and Gaols, on the ground that the presence of Imperial Convicts in Tasmania entitles this Colony to a contribution of at least that sum.

6. Before entering on the subject of reduction of Salaries and Establishments, some reference must be made to the vote of the Assembly which was the cause assigned for the resignation of His Excellency's late Advisers.

7. The House of Assembly having assented to the proposition that, under the present depressed condition of the public finances, the salaries provided by Schedule B. of the Constitution Act for the Governor, the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General, and Colonial Treasurer should be subjected to revision with a view to reduction, it becomes necessary for the Ministry to consider how far this expressed opinion of the Assembly may be carried into effect: the Ministry are prepared, so far as the present Governor's salary and allowances are concerned, to bring the subject again under the consideration of the Legislature. The Ministry have, however, no hesitation in proposing a reduction of the salaries of the responsible Officers under the new Constitution. These Officers hold their appointments on a far different tenure from the Governor. They are liable to displacement at any time on political grounds. No injustice can, consequently, be done to individuals by the reduction of the emoluments attached to officers of this description. It is therefore clearly within the province of Parliament without any breach of faith to propose that the salaries of these Officers should be fixed on a lower scale than that already provided by the Constitution Act. The Ministry propose to bring in a Bill to alter this Schedule: but, as this alteration must necessarily receive the consent of Her Majesty, its operation will be, in all probability, delayed until next year.

8. In addition to these prospective reductions in the Establishments of the Governor, Colonial Secretary, Treasurer, and Attorney-General, it is proposed to effect reductions in the Departments of the Colonial Auditor, the Director of Public Works, the Post Office, the Survey Office, the Custom House, the Police Magistrates, and the Constabulary; to abolish the office of Accountant of Stores; and to transfer the charges on the Annual Revenue for the Department of the Immigration Agent to that portion of the public debt contracted for Immigration purposes by Mr. Gregson's predecessors; and that this last item may become incorporated with the liabilities which it is hoped will be liquidated, as suggested above, by the proceeds of the sale of Waste Lands.

9. As regards the Police, it is hoped by the creation of District Municipalities, and by enlisting the assistance of Gentlemen in the Commission of the Peace, gradually to provide for the discharge by unpaid Justices of those duties at present entrusted to Sûpendiary Magistrates. The same measure would also transfer to local funds a large proportion of the General Revenue for the maintenance and control of the Constabulary.

10. Of the £10,000 voted for the improvement of the Wharves of Hobart Town and Launceston, only so much will be expended in the present condition of the public finances as may be absolutely necessary to keep them in repair.

11. The Ministry would not devote any larger amount of the sum of £10,000 voted for the erection of Public Schools than may be found to be urgently required at the present moment, as they contemplate the introduction of a measure which shall equally apportion the expense of the construction of schools between the Central Government and the Districts requiring this outlay for educational purposes.

12. Amongst the other proposed reductions the Ministry recommend the total abolition of the department of Accountant of Stores. They can see no necessity whatever for its existence. In future they propose that all supplies shall be furnished to the Heads of Departments by Contractors on an annual requisition approved of by a Board constituted as at present.

13. Ministers further propose that the payment of fixed salaries from the Treasury above the annual value of £150 should be made quarterly, instead of monthly as at present. This arrangement would not only relieve the Treasury and Audit Offices of much clerical labour, but would also, it is believed, be found conducive to the establishment of economical and prudent habits in the clerks themselves.

14. In dealing with the Public Works, the present Ministry are not inclined to adopt unaltered the scheme indicated by their predecessors in the Public Works Loan Bill, authorising an outlay of £118,000 under this head. The sums required for the completion of the Electric Telegraph between Launceston and Hobart Town, and for the New Government House, are the two most prominent items. On the first of these works a large sum of money has been guaranteed by contract. It is obviously desirable to prevent that outlay being absolutely thrown away by abandoning the works in their present state. The original scheme embraced the union of Hobart Town with Launceston by Telegraph; and the connection of Launceston by means of a submarine cable from George Town to Cape Otway. The Victorian Government is willing to pay £14,000 towards this undertaking, the cost of the coil being estimated at £34,000. To stop now would be to entail a serious waste of public money. Ministers, therefore, have come to the conclusion, that while they would have hesitated to advise such an application of the Revenue in the first instance, it ought to be left now to Parliament to decide whether it be expedient or not to incur the outlay proposed in order to connect by telegraph Tasmania with the neighbouring Colonies, and to reap thereby all the advantages of the lines which at present are proposed to connect Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, and ultimately the Continents of Europe and America by way of India, with the Australias.

15. The sum required for the completion of the New Government House is £20,000. It has been suggested that the sale of the Domain on which the present residence stands would suffice to defray this expenditure. In the present state of the country this assumption may reasonably be questioned; while it seems scarcely desirable to alienate from the inhabitants of the City a portion of ground so admirably adapted for purposes of public recreation. The propriety, therefore, of proceeding with this item the Ministry are induced to remit also for the consideration of Parliament.

16. The Ministry propose to carry out the following Public Works; viz.—the Lighthouse on King's Island; the removal of the Hobart Town Gaol; the completion of the Slaughter-house and Jetty at Macquarie Point, Hobart Town; the drainage of the Swamp, Launceston; and the new Bridge on the Launceston and George Town Road. All other works should be suspended, save where contracts have been actually entered into by the Government.

17. In consequence of the great delay which has hitherto taken place in reforming the present Departmental arrangements, it is scarcely probable that the whole of the reductions contemplated can be effected at once; but the Ministry pledge themselves to carry out retrenchment in every department with as little delay as possible.

18. No new measure of taxation will be introduced to come into effect in 1857, and the deficiency of the year as compared with the Expenditure authorised by the Estimates which have received the sanction of the Assembly, amounting to the sum of £76,000, would have to be provided for by fresh Loans, or extended sale of Crown Lands, or both; but it is hoped that the proposed reductions would very considerably lower this amount.

19. Apart from specifically financial considerations, the Ministry's Policy would embrace (1) Measures for the extension and increase of the powers now possessed by the Municipalities of Hobart Town and Launceston. A Bill to give these increased powers to the latter Town has been read a first time in the House of Assembly, but a printed copy, of it has not yet been placed in the hands of Members. Should the Ministry deem its provisions satisfactory, the Bill will receive their cordial support. (2) For creating similar Municipalities in Rural Districts on the application of the inhabitants. To these Bodies would be entrusted power of local assessment and self-government to the extent of raising and controlling a revenue equal to the maintenance and administration of a Municipal Magistracy and Police, the formation and repair of Roads, establishment of Local Schools, sanatory improvement, &c., &c. It is intended to subdivide the whole Colony for this purpose into Counties; and until this can be effected the existing Electoral Districts and Road Trusts might form the bases of these Rural Municipalities, which it is proposed to assist by grants in aid from the General Revenue proportioned to the sums levied within each District. Such a measure would, it is conceived, prove generally acceptable to the Country, and would relieve the Revenue of a considerable burthen, and the Central Government of all but the supervision of the Magisterial, Police, and Educational Institutions of the Colony. The Ministry would further propose to introduce measures (3) for the amendment of the Licensing Act; (4) the revision of the Insolvency Law; (5) to facilitate the recovery of Small Debts. In this matter the Ministry is merely following out the views of their predecessors in office. (6) To appoint a Committee to consider the expediency of a thorough revision of all those rules and regulations which, dating their origin from the time when Tasmania was a Penal Settlement, require either immediate reform or total abolition.

20. The Ministry will move that Parliament do address the Crown, through the Governor and the Secretary of State, on the subject of the law enacted in Victoria affecting both holders of Conditional Pardons, and persons actually free by servitude.

21. A Bill has already been introduced into the House of Assembly on the subject of the Master and Servants Act, and is now the subject of enquiry before a Select Committee. Should the Committee's Report suggest a measure suited to the requirements of the case, the Government will be prepared to support it ; but in the event of their being dissatisfied with the Committee's conclusions, the Ministry will lose no time in introducing a Bill of their own.

22. The same remark will apply to the Report of the very large Committee that has been sitting since the commencement of the Session on the Waste Lands Bill.

23. The Ministry is moreover desirous that the Legislature should be moved to address His Excellency for the purpose of communicating with the Governments of the other Australian Colonies with a view to the holding a conference on the propriety of establishing some combined action to effect such objects as the consolidation of the Tariffs, the equalisation of Weights and Measures, and other matters equally affecting their common welfare. Such a conference, however much it might fall short of the ends sought to be obtained, could not fail to be productive of many beneficial results.

24. To prepare the various Bills requisite to carry out the measures contemplated, to establish a system of financial reform, and to thoroughly re-organise the Departments, time must be sought for from the Legislature, and a vote in aid obtained.

25. The Ministry therefore propose, by passing the Appropriation Bill through the Legislative Council, and a Loan Bill through both Houses, to provide for the purposes already enumerated. They would then ask the Parliament for a vote in aid of (say) £55,000 to meet current demands, and would postpone the further Session of Parliament until July next. The business of the two Houses would, in this way, be disposed of in a few days ; and three months would be no more than sufficient time to mature, with due care and deliberation, the measures indicated in this Memorandum.