

CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY

AND THE

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AS TO

PREPARATION OF APARTMENTS FOR MEETING OF LEGISLATURE.

LAI'D ON THE TABLE OF THE HOUSE BY MR. SPEAKER.

WELLINGTON.

—
1867.

CORRESPONDENCE

RELATIVE TO PREPARATION OF APARTMENTS FOR MEETING OF LEGISLATURE.

No. 1.

Copy of a Letter from the SPEAKER of the House of Representatives to the CLERK.

SIR,—

Nelson, 12th June, 1867.

Parliament being summoned to meet on the 9th July, it is desirable that all necessary arrangements should be made for the comfort and convenience of Members, and the conduct of business.

It has been hitherto the custom that this has been done by the Executive Government, but I propose to adopt for the future the evidently more proper practice of having this work done by the officers of the House.

You will, therefore, have the goodness to take all the steps required for putting the Chamber in proper order for the reception of the Members, providing proper seats and table accommodation, and getting the Committee rooms ready and supplied with the requisite furniture.

It will be necessary, at the same time, that you should make some arrangement for the warming of the House, and also for its lighting; but I would suggest that any arrangement for this latter object should be of a temporary character, as it is very possible that the House Committee which is generally appointed each Session may wish to take the matter into its own hands.

It will be necessary that you make an arrangement with some one to provide refreshments at Bellamy's; and you will also have the goodness to appoint the requisite number of messengers for the House. Temporary clerks for the service of the Committees will also have to be appointed.

I enclose for your information a copy of a letter which I have addressed to the Colonial Secretary. You will, of course, in carrying out my instructions put any department of the Executive Government to as little inconvenience as possible; and before you make any contracts it will be desirable that you should ascertain that nothing in the same direction has already been done by the Colonial Secretary's Office.

You will please to report to me your proceedings from time to time.

I have, &c.,

D. MONRO,

Speaker, House of Representatives.

Major Campbell, Clerk, House of Representatives.

No. 2.

Copy of a Letter from the SPEAKER of the House of Representatives to the Hon. COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Nelson, 12th June, 1867.

It has hitherto, I believe, been the practice that prior to the meeting of Parliament the Executive Government took upon itself the responsibility and trouble of making the necessary arrangements for the comfort and convenience of Members, and the conduct of business. This practice was perhaps rendered necessary by the fact of the Speaker residing at a great distance from the place of meeting of the Legislature. Now, however, that the Legislature meets in a central place, communication with which is tolerably easy, I see no reason why the Members of the Executive Government should have imposed upon them a duty which properly, so far as the House of Representatives is concerned, belongs to the Speaker. I propose, therefore, to take upon myself the care of the material arrangements of the House of Representatives prior to the meeting of Parliament, and I have instructed Major Campbell to take the necessary steps for providing for the seating and accommodation of Members generally, and the lighting and warming of the House. In giving effect to my instructions, Major Campbell will as far as possible avoid inconveniencing any department of the Executive Government, and before taking any steps will place himself in communication with your department to know whether any definite arrangements have been made by it up to the present time.

I have, &c.,

D. MONRO,

Speaker, House of Representatives.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

No. 3.

Copy of a Letter from the COLONIAL SECRETARY to the SPEAKER of the House of Representatives. (67-1825.)

Colonial Secretary's Office,

SIR,—

Wellington, 24th June, 1867.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th instant, referring to the fact that the Government has hitherto taken the responsibility of making, before the meeting of the General Assembly, the necessary arrangements for the accommodation of Members, and proposing to take the trouble of doing so upon yourself.

The Government has carefully considered your proposal, and will at all times be anxious to act in accordance with your views in reference to the proper accommodation of Members of the House of Representatives, but is unable to divest itself of the duty and responsibility of providing the necessary accommodation for so important a portion of the machinery of Government as the General Assembly, which involves indeed not only providing the Legislative Chambers for both Houses, but also rooms for Select Committees, private bill business, refreshment rooms, accommodation for reporters, strangers, &c., and in some cases—as with respect to the present Session—the decision as to the place of meeting of Parliament, and with respect to future Sessions, the making provision for new Chambers and more extended accommodation generally in lieu of the very insufficient premises in which the business of the Legislature is at present conducted. It is evident that the Government here, as universally elsewhere, would alone be held responsible for this duty, especially as inseparably connected with it is the question of the necessary expenses which the Government have the responsibility of advising.

In so far as the existing Chamber of Representatives is concerned, it is impossible within so restricted an area to provide the fitting accommodation required, and any arrangements by whomsoever proposed must be more or less unsatisfactory. Except that the Chamber should be lighted with candles instead of kerosene, no other change since last Session has yet been made.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives.

I have, &c.,

E. W. STAFFORD.

No. 4.

Copy of a Letter from the SPEAKER of the House of Representatives to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Nelson, 26th June, 1867.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 24th in reply to mine of the 13th.

As it is not probable that it will make much difference for the ensuing Session whether the arrangements for the meeting of the Legislature are undertaken by the Executive or by myself, I shall abstain for the present from any further attempt to interfere in the matter.

There is contained, however, in the letter to which I am now replying, an assertion of duties and responsibilities on the part of the Executive Government towards the Legislature so entirely at variance with what I believe the usual and proper practice that I feel it my duty to place on record my entire dissent from it.

While things remain as they are at present, that is to say, while one and the same room is alternately used for the Legislature and the service of some department of Government, I quite agree with you that it is the duty of the Executive, before any approaching Session of Parliament, to find the necessary apartments for its accommodation.

But, in my view of the case, the duty of the Executive ends there. The apartments thus set aside are, or ought to be, in charge of the officers of the Legislature, and on these persons, and not on the Executive, should devolve the duty and responsibility of arranging and furnishing them for the convenience of Members.

You will not, I am sure, suppose that in making these assertions I have any desire to extend the boundaries of my office, or to claim the exercise of duties which do not belong to it.

But as I differ entirely from you as to the incidence of the responsibility, and believe that the Legislature has a right to look to its own officers in the matter in question, I am compelled to make the claim. I cannot be responsible where I have no control.

If our Parliamentary arrangements were at all complete, the Legislature would have its own halls and committee rooms entirely separate from the apartments in use by the Executive Government. If it be said that this cannot be the case at present, I would reply that the more closely we approximate to such a state of things, even with our present imperfect arrangements, the better. If I understand at all the spirit of English Parliamentary Government, there is no maxim more jealously observed than this—that the Legislature should enjoy the most perfect independence, and be free from all control or interference from the Executive Government, even in matters of the most apparently trivial character. The Constitution, as every one knows, assigns certain definite powers to the Executive, such, for instance, as prorogation and dissolution. But beyond the legitimate exercise of these and other similar constitutional powers, I conceive it to be of the utmost importance that the Legislature should be subject to no interference from the Executive Government, and should hold its own machinery in its own hands. Such, at all events, I hold to be the spirit and the practice of English constitutional government, and as my experience as Speaker of the House of Representatives teaches me that this is the great model by which the House seeks to regulate its proceedings, I feel bound to assert, on behalf of its officers, a right to the exercise of certain duties which I believe to be discharged by those who occupy analogous positions in the British Parliament, and all countries where Parliamentary Government prevails.

I have, &c.,

D. MONRO,

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

Speaker, House of Representatives.