

FURTHER PAPERS RELATIVE TO THE MELBOURNE POSTAL CONFERENCE.

No. 1.

Copy of a Letter from the Hon. H. PARKES to the Hon. E. W. STAFFORD.

Colonial Secretary's Office,

Sydney, New South Wales, 12th August, 1867.

SIR,—

I have the honor to transmit for your information, in relation to the proceedings of the Postal Conference held at Melbourne, in March last, copies of correspondence between the Chief Secretaries of South Australia and Victoria and this Government, on some points of dispute which have been raised in the Legislature of Victoria, as to whether the Minutes of the Conference recorded its decisions with sufficient clearness, or whether some understanding formed a part of its decisions which was not expressed in the minutes; copies of a private correspondence between the Hon. George F. Verdon and myself on the same subject, which has been made public at the instance of Mr. Verdon, are also enclosed. Not printed.

2. At the same time, agreeably to the spirit of the sixth resolution, moved by me, and adopted by the Conference on the 18th March, I beg to transmit a copy of the Federal Council Bill, about to be submitted to Parliament by this Government. In my letter to the Chief Secretary of Victoria some explanations are offered on the provisions of this Bill, to which I desire to invite your attention.

3. It will be observed that the principal point contended for by Mr. McCulloch, is that some understanding was arrived at by the Conference that the Port of Melbourne was to be the head quarters of the trunk line of steamers, by way of King George's Sound; and that I am appealed to avowedly to confirm the correctness of this position. I am unable to admit the existence of any such understanding for the simple reason that I possess no knowledge of it. I cannot for a moment doubt but that Mr. McCulloch and Mr. Verdon are perfectly sincere in the belief they have expressed, and possibly some words on the subject may have been exchanged between themselves, which in the distraction of public business, they are under the impression were communicated to the other representatives; but neither I nor my colleague in the representation of this Colony at the Conference have any recollection of any such understanding, or of any discussion that could have led to it. So far from containing any record in support of the view, which is held by the representatives of Victoria, the Minutes of the Conference would certainly lead to the contrary conclusion. The list of branch services proposed by Mr. Hall, one of the representatives of New Zealand, and the provisions of which were absolutely necessary to connect the trunk lines, does not leave the matter in doubt. The Minutes show that the branch services were not disposed of hastily. An amendment on the list proposed was moved by Mr. Boucaut and negatived, and other amendments having been assented to, "the List" was agreed to by the Conference.

I apprehend it will not be questioned that this is the document which ought to define where the trunk lines should terminate, and the language of this document, under the head of "Service *via* King George's Sound," is precise and clear. Elsewhere, the Minutes are silent, but here, which is the proper place, they speak distinctly:—"On the arrival of the Suez steamer at Melbourne, one branch steamer to leave for Launceston, and another for New Zealand;—on the arrival of the same Suez steamer at Sydney, a branch steamer to leave for Brisbane."

4. I am desired by His Excellency Sir John Young to explain that the position taken up by this Government is that the Records of the Conference cannot be supplemented or altered except by another Conference, or similar body representing the whole of the associated Colonies, and that those records distinctly provide for the arrival of the Suez steamer, *via* King George's Sound, at the port of Sydney.

5. It is of course admitted that it is open to the six Colonies in conference to decide on any other terminus. But it is maintained, and I do not see how it can be questioned, that so far as proceedings have yet gone, the decision is in favour of Sydney. If this scheme of a Federal Postal Service should fortunately arrive at a stage when the duty of carrying it into effect will have to be undertaken, I apprehend the views and reasonings of contractors will have to be considered in maturing such arrangements as may appear to be best calculated to secure to all the associated Colonies an equal participation in its benefits. There will be no disposition on the part of New South Wales to disturb the harmony of deliberations so conducted by claiming any consideration for the port of Sydney, except on the broadest ground of federal advantage. This Government fully assents to the principle that the terminus of each of the three trunk lines should be determined by consulting the interests of all the Colonies in their federal relationship. In this spirit, New South Wales joined in the Conference, and in this spirit its Government is prepared to continue in united action with the sister Colonies.

I have, &c.,

HENRY PARKES.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary of New Zealand, Wellington.