

our own interests to carry a line across the continent, either direct to Port Darwin or to some point on the company's line. If we went direct to Port Darwin the company would, no doubt, abandon their land section and terminate there.

It is some eleven or twelve years since I first drew the attention of the Government to the practicability of erecting a land line from Port Augusta to the Northern coast, and every addition to our knowledge of the interior since acquired has confirmed the views I then advanced.

We have then two plans to consider : First, to undertake the responsibility of a line right through, from Port Augusta to Port Darwin, to be completed simultaneously, or as nearly so as possible, with the landing of the cable, *i.e.*, by the end of 1871—the company pledging themselves to terminate the cable there ; or, second, to let the company construct their proposed land line to Burketown, but reserve the right to connect with them at some intermediate point, either on the Roper or Nicholson.

The distances are as follows :—From Port Augusta to Port Darwin 1,550 or, say, 1,600 miles ; to the Roper, say 1,400 ; to the Nicholson, say 1,100.

The first plan, if Stuart's track were followed, would secure the whole of the traffic to South Australia, but there would be the disadvantage of depending on a single line, which would be obviated by going to the Nicholson, or by letting Queensland connect with us, at either the Nicholson or Roper, according to the route taken.

If the second plan is adopted, we shall have to arrive at some arrangement as to the division of traffic—what messages shall go *via* South Australia, and what *via* Queensland.

The simplest, and perhaps the most equitable, arrangement would be a fixed tariff common to both routes, and an equal division of receipts between South Australia and Queensland.

A careful consideration of the whole question induces me to recommend that the Government should undertake to introduce a measure, immediately after the new Parliament meets, for providing, by means of a loan, for the construction, at once, of a line of telegraph from Port Augusta to Port Darwin—Commander Osborn guaranteeing, on the part of the company, to terminate the cable there. This, I understand, Commander Osborn would be quite willing to do, or at least to recommend to the British-Australian Company, with whom he would communicate, to save time, by the Indo-European telegraph next mail.

To remove all cause for jealousy, as well as to provide an alternative line, Queensland should be invited to connect with us at some convenient point ; and this, in my opinion, would be far better than a central station at Cooper's Creek with radiating lines to each capital, as has been suggested, but which I have shown to involve a useless expenditure of money.

The company would, no doubt, readily fall in with this plan, as their connection with two independent routes would make them secure from interruption, an advantage of equal importance to the colonies.

With regard to cost, it will much depend on timber being found along the route. Much of the country is, I believe, destitute of serviceable trees, and transport will therefore form a serious item. I propose, however, to use only fifteen or twenty poles to the mile, and, in some places, stone cairns, and by this means keep the expenditure down. It would not be safe to estimate the cost at less than £80 per mile, or, say, £120,000, which is the sum I would recommend should be provided by loan.

We might recoup ourselves for a portion—say one-fourth or one-third—by the sale of land in the Northern Territory, which the telegraph would do so much to open up.

Next, as regards maintenance : having two lines to depend upon, it would not be necessary to have stations so close together. Stations at the Blinman and Yudanamutana Mines on the projected line of railway of 200 miles would be supported by local traffic. As far as pastoral stations extend, we should not require an extensive staff, as we could easily arrange with the settlers to assist in keeping the line in order, *i.e.*, to repair casualties. Three or four stations with four men at each would be sufficient to bridge over the interior to the Nicholson or Roper. The annual maintenance would probably not exceed £8,000.

*Revenue.*—The company reckon sixty-five messages each way per diem for 330 working days. My estimate in previous reports was only twenty-five each way, or fifty per diem, and this moderate calculation, at 10s. a message, would yield £8,250, or a little more than the cost of maintenance, leaving the interest on first outlay unprovided for. That is all our existing lines do ; they barely pay their working expenses ; but no one doubts that they indirectly more than repay the colony by the facilities they afford to the commerce of the country. It should be borne in mind that the business will yearly increase with the growth of the colonies ; and further, that the line will promote more than anything else the development of the North. There can be no doubt of its being remunerative in a few years.

We might effect an actual saving on the completion of the line by discontinuing the branch mail service to King George's Sound, which, with direct telegraphic communication with England, would no longer be so necessary. If the second plan is adopted, and we connect with the company's line at the Nicholson, £100,000 will be sufficient, but we should in that case have to divide receipts with Queensland. In the one case we have the control of a main line through, with a branch to Queensland ; in the other we have simply a branch line connecting with the main to Queensland.

Should the Government concur in the views I have expressed, I would suggest that immediate steps should be taken for obtaining from the Surveyor-General a report as to the best route, which his extensive knowledge of the country will enable him to furnish. He has, I think, a party of surveyors well advanced on the eastern boundary, who might perhaps be made useful as a flying expedition, with a view to discover the route offering the greatest facilities. As the cable will be laid by the end of 1871, we have no time to lose ; whatever is done must be done quickly.

In conclusion I would observe that it is next to impossible for more favorable terms to be offered to us ; and, if we fail to accept them, we must be prepared to leave to Queensland the exclusive honor of having, through her own unaided enterprise and energy, afforded to the Australian colonies the immense advantages of telegraphic communication with the whole civilized world. Our geographical position and our intelligence alike prohibit this.

I have, &c.,

CHARLES TODD,  
Superintendent of Telegraphs.

The Hon. the Treasurer.