

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 6TH JULY, 1881.

No. 67.—Petition of ALEXANDER BROGDEN and Others.

Messrs. W T L. Travers, and C. W. Cave, appeared to conduct the proceedings on behalf of the petitioners, and Mr. H. D. Bell was present on behalf of the Government of New Zealand.

The Chairman: The Committee have decided to hear the counsel for the petitioners in this case, and also to take the evidence of any witnesses whom he may desire to call in support of their petition. Mr. Travers may therefore make a statement if he wishes to do so.

Mr. Travers: I appear on behalf of the Messrs. Brogden, in support of the petition which they have presented to the House of Representatives, and which has been referred to this Committee. Before calling your attention to the evidence which the petitioners propose to adduce, I may, perhaps, be permitted to refer to circumstances which occurred both anterior and subsequent to the immigration arrangements which have resulted in this proceeding. After Sir Julius Vogel had proposed his scheme of public works to the Parliament of the colony, and after it had been adopted, he proceeded to England—presumably with the view of ascertaining in what manner it could best be carried into effect. Whilst there, he entered into communications with the Messrs. Brogden; the result being that certain contracts were entered into, dependent, however, upon their ratification by the General Assembly. But Messrs. Brogden, taking Sir Julius Vogel's official position into consideration, and naturally conceiving that any arrangement which he had made would be agreed to by his colleagues and ratified by the Legislature at once, at his suggestion, sent out a staff of engineers and other skilled persons, and invested money in plant, and, in fact, did in other respects what would be necessary to start a large scheme of public works. Mr. James Brogden, one of the members of the firm of Brogden and Sons, came out to the colony in 1871, only to find that Parliament, advised by the Government of which Mr. Vogel was the leading member, had not thought fit to ratify either of the contracts which had been made with them. The Assembly, however, feeling that this involved an injustice, determined to give Messrs. Brogden the construction of works to the value of £1,000,000. The specific contracts for these works were not entered into until August, 1872; but, in the meantime, some works were being carried on at Auckland under a provisional arrangement. Shortly after the arrival of Mr. James Brogden, negotiations were opened by the Government with him with reference to a scheme of immigration. There is one thing which I wish to call the attention of the Committee to particularly, at this point, and that is, that this immigration matter had no connection whatever with the arrangements for the construction of railways. The one thing was entirely independent of the other. The contracts were entirely separate. It is important to bear this in mind, because it was suggested on a former occasion, that, in the contracts for works, some allowance had been made for possible losses in connection with the immigration contract. In effect, we wish the Committee to understand that we treat this matter as entirely dissociated from the contracts for works entered into, whether then, in 1872, or with any other subsequent contracts. Now, this question of immigration was intimately associated with the Public Works scheme, for it was felt that any attempt to carry out that scheme would be attended with serious effects, resulting from the certain disturbance of the labor market, unless provision was made to meet this by means of emigration. Indeed, at that time, the colony was not in such a state as to warrant the construction of the class of works proposed, without providing simultaneously for the immigration of people in large numbers. I intend to put in, as evidence in this case, all the papers and documents bearing on the subject of the petition; but I propose to call the attention of the Committee specifically only to those parts of the documents which have the most direct bearing on the case of the petitioners. I will, in the first place, call the attention of the Committee to certain passages in the correspondence, which took place between members of the Government and others at the time when the Public Works scheme was in what may be called its "fullest swing." The Hon. Mr. Gisborne (who was then a member of the Government), in a memorandum dated the 25th November, 1871, refers to the necessity of immigration in connection with the carrying out of public works, as follows:—

I need not inform you that the public works which it is intended to construct will absorb, beyond the ordinary labour of the colony, a large amount of imported labour for a considerable period; and very serious inconvenience to existing industries, not to mention great additional expense in carrying out the proposed works, would be occasioned, if for some time there was not a continuous flow of labour into the colony.

You may deduct from the number stated in the attached list those immigrants whom you have, since your arrival in England, sent out or engaged to send, under the regulations already in your possession. The number stated in the list is to be independent of the immigrants to be sent out under arrangements with Messrs. John Brogden and Sons, particulars as to which will be separately addressed to you, and that number also to be independent of those whom you may send out under nomination by persons already in the colony.

The Minister then goes on to state how many immigrants he wishes to arrive in the colony in the year 1872, and he says: "Half of that number I desire that you will cause to be forwarded with the least possible delay. You may deduct from the number stated in the attached list those immigrants whom you have, since your arrival in England, sent out, or engaged to send, under the regulations already in your possession. The number stated in the list is to be independent of the immigrants to be sent out under arrangements with Messrs. John Brogden and Sons, particulars as to which will be separately addressed to you, and that number also to be independent of those whom you may send out under nomination by persons already in the colony." You will see by this that the Minister requires that no fewer than 8,000 statute adults shall be brought out to the colony, exclusive both of nominated