

SESS. II.—1891.
NEW ZEALAND.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF), TOGETHER WITH APPENDIX.

Report brought up 8th September, 1891, and ordered to be printed.

ORDER OF REFERENCE.

Extract from the Journals of the House of Representatives.

WEDNESDAY, THE 17TH DAY OF JUNE, 1891.

Ordered, "That a Committee be appointed, with power to call for persons and papers, to inquire into and report as to the form and working of Executive Governments elsewhere, with a view to such modifications of the existing system of government in New Zealand as will diminish the evils of the present party-system: the Committee to consist of the Hon. Mr. Bryce, Mr. Palmer, Captain Russell, Dr. Newman, Mr. Buick, Hon. Sir J. Hall, Mr. Saunders, Mr. J. W. Thomson, Hon. Mr. Ward, and the mover; three to be a quorum."—(Mr. O'CONNOR.)

R E P O R T.

1. YOUR Committee have the honour to report that, in their opinion, many and very serious evils are inseparably connected with, and spring from, the system of party government here; that it is unsuited to such a colony as New Zealand; and that in other colonies, and even in England, similar evils have been felt, varying only in degree, consequent upon surrounding circumstances and different phases of the system.

2. Your Committee, having consulted various standard works enumerated in the records, have made numerous extracts, a few of which are annexed to this report. The works referred to generally condemn party government as demoralising and wasteful not only in a financial sense, but also of the time and energy of electors and their representatives.

3. Even in England, where party government has grown up by degrees and under peculiar circumstances, reforms will be required before it is accepted as satisfactory, and therefore it should not be regarded as the best model upon which to form a Constitution for the government of a new country. A variety of circumstances exist in New Zealand which do not exist in Great Britain, and which make it desirable that any system of government adopted here should rest upon well-understood law, and be adapted to the peculiar circumstances and requirements of the colony.

4. The vast difference in the population and importance of the two countries must be duly appreciated before we can justly estimate the suitability or unsuitability of British usages for adoption in this country.

5. This is especially manifest with reference to the parliamentary rule by which a government is dependent for its existence from day to day upon being able to secure the support of a majority of the people's representatives for every one of its more important measures; a system which offers a constant temptation to the members to struggle not for the common good of the nation, but for the possession of place and power. In a country like England, where there are over six hundred and forty members of the House of Commons, and where only exalted station, strong influence, or transcendent ability can place a member within reach of a seat in the Cabinet, this demoralising feature is not so injuriously felt as it is in New Zealand, where a large proportion of members will probably believe themselves to be quite eligible for office.

6. Even amongst the millions of Great Britain it is not every century that produces in any one individual that rare combination of administrative and controversial power which the greatest English statesmen have possessed, and therefore we should not adopt any system under which the less important power of controversy is sure to be preferred to the far more essential qualification of administrative ability.

7. The rule that a Ministry must be unanimous in all its decisions, that each member is responsible for the actions of the whole, and the whole for the actions of each member, is calculated to