

With the object of discussing the whole question, a Postal Conference met at Sydney in 1883, at which a resolution was carried that the Colonies should apply for admission to the Union under the special conditions referred to above. New Zealand was not represented at the Conference, but it was in accord with the decision. Queensland, however, voted against the resolution. The Colonies did apply for admission; and the application was considered at the Lisbon Congress, which, however, did not meet till February, 1885, owing to the outbreak of cholera in 1884. Invitations had been sent to the Colonies to send representatives to the Congress, and this was responded to by Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia. The representatives of the various States forming the Union showed a marked desire for the Colonies to enter the Union, and were prepared to make concessions. The *status quo* in regard to sea-rates and postage till after the next Congress was settled without difficulty; but on the question of votes there was strong opposition. A fundamental principle of the Union is that every State—important or unimportant—has one voice, and only one, at the Congresses: for instance, Great Britain has one vote, and Servia, equally, has one. Only one vote, therefore, would be accorded the Australasian group. This was unacceptable, and the Colonies decided to hold aloof from the Union in the meantime.

In 1889 the matter was again brought prominently under the notice of the Colonies, but the question of representation or voting power was still a stumbling-block. The principal colonies claimed to have a separate vote, which was again refused; but they subsequently agreed that if three votes, or even two, were allowed the Australasian group, this would be accepted.

But the decision of the Colonies in 1890 to reduce the postage on letters to the United Kingdom to 2½d. really paved the way for their early entry into the Union, as the major loss was thereby discounted. In September of that year, the Colonies were invited to send representatives to the Postal Union Congress to be held in Vienna, in May, 1891. This colony decided to be represented, and to join with the other colonies in applying to enter the Union on such terms as might be mutually agreed upon.

An Intercolonial Postal Conference, to be held in Sydney at the beginning of 1891, was subsequently decided upon, at which the question of the Colonies entering the Union would be discussed and settled. The Conference met in February, 1891, and passed the following resolutions:—

“That the Colonies of Australasia should accept the invitation to be present at the Postal Congress at Vienna.

“That the Governments of the various Australasian Colonies take steps to have their respective colonies adequately represented at the Postal Congress to be held in Vienna in May next.

“That the representatives of Australasia be instructed to advocate the admission of Australasia into the Postal Union, on condition that Australasia receives adequate representation, and that the maritime transit-rates be not lowered without the consent of the countries maintaining the sea-services.”

What was really meant by “adequate representation” was unfortunately left to be inferred: but the intention was that the Colonies should be given three, or at least two, votes. The Agent-General for New Zealand was to have represented this colony at the Vienna Congress; but he was prevented from pressure of important business. The representatives of the other colonies attended the Congress, and applied for the entry of Australasia into the Union, provided that the Colonies should have, at least, two votes. This, however, was decidedly refused. The representatives then agreed that “Australasia will enter the Universal Postal Union on the conditions arranged with the sub-committee on the 22nd May, 1891—namely: That the colonies in question be allowed a single separate voice at the Congresses, and in the affairs of the Union; and that the transit-rates for sea conveyance remain unchanged until after the next quinquennial Congress.” This announcement was received by the Congress with great enthusiasm, and, at the request of the President, the members rose *en masse* and welcomed the Colonies into the Union. It was considered no slight achievement to secure the adhesion of Australasia; and Dr. von Stephan, Secretary of State for the Imperial German Post Office (and also President of the Vienna Congress) made reference to the event in a speech to the German Reichstag, in the following terms: “On the 1st July, 1892 (the date from which the revised Convention of Vienna will come into force), the frontiers of all countries and continents throughout the inhabited globe will be effaced, and entire liberty of communication will be established, since Australia, the last division of the globe that was still outside the Postal Union, joined this alliance at the Congress of Vienna.”

The Universal Postal Union may be said to now practically comprise all the countries of the world of commercial importance except the British colonies and Dutch republics of South Africa; and of these Natal and the South African Republic have just applied for admission, and the others, it is anticipated, will shortly follow their lead.

The Union provides uniform definitions and conditions of transmission respecting the different classes of mail-matter, which are binding on all the countries within its circle for international exchanges.

The postages throughout the territory of the Union are limited to between 2½d. and 5d. for letters, 1d. and 1½d. for post-cards, and ½d. and 1d. per 2oz. for printed papers, commercial papers, and patterns and samples, with minima for the two latter of 2½d. and 3d., and between 1d. and 1½d. respectively, or their equivalents in the moneys of the country of origin. It will be observed that the international rates of postage now charged in the colony are the lowest under the Union for all classes of correspondence excepting post-cards, and for newspapers for the United Kingdom.