

POSTAL AND TELEGRAPHIC CONFERENCE, 1895.

REPORT OF THE DEBATES.

SATURDAY, 2ND FEBRUARY, 1895.

The PRESIDENT (Hon. J. Gavan Duffy), took the Chair at 10 o'clock.

Thanks.

Mr WARD returned thanks to the Members of the Conference for the arrangements that had been made for his personal convenience.

Black Labour on Mail Boats.

Mr FYSH produced a letter from the Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council, Melbourne, protesting against any extension of mail contracts with the P & O Company as long as they employed coloured labour on their boats.

The letter was read and ordered to lie on the Table.

Pacific Mail Service.

Mr WARD I anticipated that probably some other member of the Conference would have taken up this question of the Pacific Mail Service this year. I desire, however, to state briefly what my views upon this matter are. As you are aware, at the Conference last year a resolution was carried in favour of a four-weekly mail service *viâ* Vancouver, and since then the matter has assumed a very much more live state. I myself think, in order to bring about a practical solution of the question, this Conference ought to affirm generally the necessity of subsidising this service to ensure its being established on proper lines. At the present time there are 300,000 tourists visiting England annually, and each of these spending £100 means an expenditure of £30,000,000. I think, therefore, that every one representing the Colonies of Australia will see the great importance it will be to us to have a Vancouver service to induce a portion of this large number of people to come to the Colonies. That, I take it, every representative will agree with me in. The whole of the Colonies, and indeed the civilized world, we all know, are suffering from depressed prices, and it is surely our business, as far as we can, to take advantage of any source of traffic which would contribute in any way to the increase of our customs revenue and the general wealth of our people. That being so, I would earnestly press on the delegates present the importance of establishing a link which would have the effect of diverting a portion of the large tourist traffic I have referred to to our shores. The service we proposed last year was a 21-day one between New Zealand and Vancouver, computed on a speed of 15½ knots per hour. There is no desire to have a faster service than that, neither could there be any wish on the part of steamship owners to have a greater speed. Speaking for New Zealand, I think you will see that it would not suit us to have a forked service or transshipping service, in fact, it would not be worth our while to come in and give a direct subsidy if we are to be served by a branch service. We are prepared to considerably increase the amount indicated by myself at the Wellington Conference in order to give effect to our earnest desire to have this line established. I think New South Wales should be more desirous than any other colony to see the line established, as Sydney would obtain the advantages from being the terminal port and an expenditure of about £80,000 a year. We in New Zealand expect to gain nothing beyond the fact of these steamers giving us a direct connection with Vancouver and an outlet to Canada, however small it may be, for some of our surplus products. If New Zealand is prepared to increase its subsidy, which it is, I would suggest to Mr Cook that New South Wales, with the vast interests she has at stake, might also increase its payment to ensure this line becoming an accomplished fact. I can only re-affirm the resolution that was passed at the last Conference, but, looking at the matter broadly, I cannot see that there is anything of greater importance to Australasia than seeking to obtain fresh fields for trade, thereby assisting in the development of the country and removing from us the present financial depression. If we could, by establishing a line of first-class steamers to Canada, only get a small proportion of the tourist traffic, I think it would add materially to the success of these Colonies. I will conclude by moving—

“That this Conference re-affirms the desirableness of establishing a four-weekly service (alternating with the San Francisco service between Australia, New Zealand, and Vancouver, the mail steamers calling at one main port in New Zealand and such ports in Australia as may be determined upon, and that the respective Governments be urged to take this up.”