

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,

Friday, 22nd January, 1875.

Swearing in of Member—Papers Tabled—Coolie Labor—Responsible Government: Message from the Governor, No. 1.—Philadelphia Exhibition: Message from the Governor, No. 2.

The SPEAKER took the Chair at 7 p.m.
PRAYERS.

SWEARING IN OF MEMBER.

The SPEAKER administered the Oath of Allegiance to the Hon. H. H. Hocking.

PAPERS TABLED.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. F. P. Barlee) laid on the Table of the House the following papers:—

1. Letter from Mr. John Forrest, thanking His Excellency and the Members of the Legislative Council for their high appreciation of services rendered by him and party on late exploring expedition to South Australia.
2. Letter from Mr. Richard Hodgson, dated 21st December, 1874, remarking on Bonus voted by Legislative Council for Smelting Works at Champion Bay.
3. Report on Fremantle Harbor and proposed improvements, by W. W. Wardell, Esq., C. E., Inspector General of Public Works, Victoria; with the explanatory plans.

COOLIE LABOR.

Mr. MARMION laid upon the Table of the House a letter he had received from Mr. W. Wanliss, the Manager of the Rockingham Jarrahdale Timber Company, Limited, dated the 15th January, 1875, relative to Coolie immigration. The company, experiencing much inconvenience and loss consequent upon the great difficulty of obtaining an adequate supply of European labor to carry on operations, and finding that no portion of the grant voted by the Council for the introduction of Coolie labor had been appropriated, submitted the following proposal for the consideration of the Government, and which if acquiesced in would tend to remove one of the only obstacles now in the way of developing more of the most valuable resources of the colony:—That the company, on condition that the Government introduce 120 Coolies of a suitable class, undertake to give them a five years' engagement immediately on their arrival, to provide them with suitable lodging and food, and pay them wages at a rate to be agreed upon. The

Company, at the expiration of 12 months, undertake to refund to the Government the whole cost of introducing such labor, and, at the expiration of the term of their agreement, to return the Coolies to the country from whence they emigrated. He (Mr. Marmion) intimated his intention, at the next sitting of the Council, to move a resolution in connection with the foregoing proposal.

RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT.

Message from the Governor—No. 1.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of the following Message from His Excellency the Governor:—

WILLIAM C. F. ROBINSON,
Governor.

The Governor submits for the careful and impartial consideration of The Honorable The Legislative Council a copy of a Despatch which he has received from Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, under date the 18th November, 1874, on the question of Responsible Government.

Government House, Perth, 22nd January, 1875.

The Despatch read as follows:—

Downing Street, 18th Nov., 1874.

SIR.—I have received Mr. Weld's Despatch No. 95, of the 11th August, in which he reported that the Legislative Council had adopted a resolution in favor of the introduction of Responsible Government praying the Governor to bring in a Bill for the purpose, and to recommend Her Majesty to approve the same.

2. In his reply Mr. Weld promised to prepare such a Bill, and, in the event of it being passed, to recommend that Her Majesty's assent should be given to it, and the system of Ministerial Responsibility be with the least possible delay established in Western Australia. A copy of this Bill was enclosed in Mr. Weld's Despatch, in which he further stated that after it had been read a second time he had thought it right to dissolve the Council, with a speech of which a copy was also transmitted.

3. As only a year previously Mr. Weld had confidentially informed my predecessor that for various reasons he did not consider the colony fit for Responsible Government, and had been desired in reply not to take any step to disturb the existing arrangements, it is with some surprise and regret that I now learn, that without any previous intimation that such

a measure was contemplated, or any reference to the opinions of Her Majesty's present Government, the Governor has publicly pledged himself to urge that this most serious change shall be immediately made, and that a Bill dealing with many questions of difficulty, in respect of which much care must in any case be required, has been considered by the Council.

4. Even if the circumstances of Western Australia had been more similar to those of the other Australasian Colonies, and if its population had been much larger, it would have been desirable (as in those Colonies) to allow full time for deliberation, both as to the principle of so serious an alteration in the Constitution, and as to the details of the legislation necessary to effect it. But, in the present case, I am bound to remember that we are dealing with a Colony of vast extent, at present inhabited by a population estimated to number in all only about 26,000 persons, of whom it has been stated that some 8,000 are adult males, and of these, as I understand, between 5,000 and 6,000 are persons formerly transported as convicts from this country. To this must be added the consideration that the tracts of productive land are throughout the greater part of the Colony, as at present known, so limited and scattered that there is little reason for expecting that it will, at all events at any early date, be continuously occupied by such a population as has in the other Australasian Colonies furnished sufficient materials for Parliamentary Government.

5. Under these circumstances, not only do I entertain grave doubts as to the prudence, in the case of Western Australia, of at present resorting to a system of party Government by ministers responsible to Parliament, but, assuming the principle of this change to be conceded, I observe several important questions on which it would be necessary to arrive at a clear understanding.

6. Among these I may mention one which has already been the subject of much discussion, namely, the provision to be made for the future custody and supervision of the Imperial convicts now serving their sentences in the Colony.

7. Another point on which my information is inadequate is the probable sufficiency of the Colonial Revenue to meet the greatly increased administrative expenditure inevitable resulting from the

more complex form of Government, it being remembered that the Colony must in such case assume wholly or in part, various charges hitherto defrayed from Imperial Funds. Some £14,000 a year are at present contributed by this country towards the expenses of the Colonial Government in consideration of the number of convicts who, having completed their sentences, are now at large in Western Australia. I do not say that this payment would of necessity be abruptly and entirely terminated on the establishment of Responsible Government: this is, I may observe in passing, a question on which I shall be obliged to consult the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury before I could announce any decision; but it is obvious that a community aspiring to self government must be prepared, if not at once at least soon, to undertake the charges of Government.

8. As soon as practicable after the receipt of Mr. Weld's Despatch I telegraphed to request him not to hasten proceedings in connection with Responsible Government, and I am in hopes that on your arrival you will have found that the question has been as far as possible reserved for you to deal with. I further informed him that if the decided opinion of the clear majority of the Colony should prove favorable to the change, the expediency of which I doubted, I would give it my careful consideration, but that I must reserve my decision until I received more information. As you are aware, Imperial legislation would be necessary for the purpose of repealing certain Acts, and of vesting the Crown Lands in the Colonial Legislature; and the Bill ultimately adopted by the Colonial Council, if approved by Her Majesty, must be laid before both Houses of Parliament for thirty days before Her Majesty's pleasure thereon is formally signified. In such case, looking to these requirements, and to the delays that may unavoidably arise when numerous questions of detail have to be settled at a great distance, it must be borne in mind that immediate action may not be practicable. Even if on arriving in Western Australia you find that the public feeling of the Colony is decidedly in favor of the change, it must be very doubtful whether all the necessary steps could be completed before the end of the next Session of the Imperial Parliament; and it will be one of your first duties to explain to those who are most eager for immediate action that even if desirable it may not be possible.

9. It is, I hope, quite unnecessary for me to say that in these remarks I am and can be actuated by no feeling of indisposition towards those principles of Responsible Government which have had full play elsewhere on the Australian Continent, and have reproduced the free institutions of the Mother Country in no unworthy form. Those institutions are the proper and desirable end to which the colony tends, at which it must in time arrive, and towards which all those, whether there or at home, who are concerned in the administration of its affairs, ought to direct their measures. This question is, in my opinion, merely one of time; and as soon as it can be shown that by population, revenue, and the other conditions of self government, the colony is qualified for the change, no one will welcome that change more cordially than myself. But, on a calm review of its present circumstances and conditions, I cannot but question whether this great alteration is not somewhat premature, and I feel it my duty, though not a grateful one to me personally, to withhold any hasty consent, and to interpose at least such prudent delays as will secure a full and dispassionate consideration of a decision which is fraught with such important consequences to the Colony.

I have, &c.,
CARNARVON.

PHILADELPHIA EXHIBITION.

Message from the Governor—No. 2.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of the following Message from His Excellency the Governor:—

WILLIAM C.F. ROBINSON,
Governor.

The Governor recommends to the favourable consideration of The Honorable The Legislative Council a copy of a letter, with enclosures, received from the Victorian Commissioners for the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1876, inviting this Colony to take part in the Exhibition which it is proposed shall be held in Melbourne in the month of August next.

Government House, Perth, 22nd January, 1875.

The Council adjourned at 7.40 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,

Monday, 25th January, 1875.

Swearing in of Member—Assent to Bills—Coolie Labor—Responsible Government: Despatch from Secretary of State—Philadelphia Exhibition—Committee for Coolie Immigration

The SPEAKER took the Chair at 7 p.m.

PRAYERS.

SWEARING IN OF MEMBER.

The SPEAKER administered the Oath of Allegiance to Mr. George Randell, the newly elected member for Perth.

ASSENT TO BILLS.

Message from the Governor.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of the following Message from His Excellency the Governor:—

The Governor; on the twenty seventh day of November, in the year of Our Lord, 1874, and in the 38th year of Her Majesty's reign, was pleased, in the name and on behalf of the Queen, to assent to the following Acts, that is to say:—

"An Act to control Recruiting in Western Australia for the service of Foreign States."

"An Act to appropriate the sum of One Hundred and Fifty-two Thousand One Hundred and Sixteen Pounds Eight Shillings and Twopence out of the Revenue of the Colony for the Service of the year One thousand eight hundred and seventy-five."

"An Act for the Incorporation of the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod of Perth as Trustees of the Branch of the Church of England in Western Australia."

COOLIE LABOR.

Mr. MARMION, in accordance with notice, moved that the introduction of Chinese Coolies asked for by the Rockingham Jarrahdale Timber Company, Limited, be undertaken by the committee named by this Honorable Council, and that such committee regulate the terms and conditions under which such introduction shall take place, and negotiate the arrangements with the manager of the company.

Mr. BICKLEY moved, as an amendment, that the Proposition cannot be complied with.