



NEW ZEALAND
GOVERNMENT GAZETTE
(PROVINCE OF NELSON).

Published by Authority.

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By His Honor's command,

J. C. RICHMOND, Provincial Secretary.

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NELSON, SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 1863.

No. 25.

Provincial Secretary's Office, Nelson,
August 29, 1863.

HIS Honor the Superintendent directs the publication of the following Correspondence, relative to the construction of the proposed line of Railway.

J. C. RICHMOND,
Provincial Secretary.

Superintendent's Office, Nelson,
August 14, 1863.

The Honorable
The COLONIAL SECRETARY,
Auckland.

SIR,—I have the honor to enclose, for the consideration of his Excellency the Governor, a copy of a series of resolutions, passed in the Provincial Council, approving of the construction of a line of Railway to the interior of this Province, and of the raising a sum of £300,000 by loan for this and other purposes.

In forwarding these resolutions, it is right that I should state that the Council was pretty evenly divided on the questions. Twelve members (including the Speaker,

who voted in Committee) approved, and ten disapproved.

It is also my duty to furnish his Excellency's Government with my own views on the subject. Of the ultimate great public utility of the proposed work I am satisfied. It is possible the quantity of land which would be improved by its construction would justify the outlay if the whole of the improved land could be charged with it. But I am compelled to hesitate about the propriety of the undertaking chiefly by the fact that the districts to be improved in the highest degree by it, may possibly at some early day, be separated from this Province, and the whole burden cast on a part of the community at the same time that the means of bearing it are greatly reduced. His Excellency's advisers are doubtless aware that there is an influx of diggers going on into this Province from Otago and Australia: and a high probability exists that rich gold fields may be discovered on all parts of the River Buller and its tributaries. The presence of a population approaching in numbers to that of the Otago gold fields, if even it should not continue settled beyond a few years, might of itself justify the proposed outlay. A few months, or perhaps weeks,

will decide whether this is or is not to be the position of the Province; and I would respectfully suggest that his Excellency should be advised to suspend his judgment on the resolutions for a time. There are other reasons for such a course. The objections urged in the Provincial Council and out of doors are, doubts as to the quantity and quality of Crown Lands to be rendered accessible and improved in value by such a work, and as to the cost of the work itself. Our present knowledge of the country is imperfect, and whether rich gold fields are found or not we are certain to increase that knowledge very fast as the summer comes on by means of the tracks now in progress, and the exhaustive prospecting which is going on. Nearly every new line that is cut through the forest opens new indications of mineral wealth, and indications of a coal field have appeared on the Upper Buller near the River Owen, one of its tributaries. Fresh approaches to the main valley are moreover being discovered from time to time. I think it quite possible that a very short period may place the question beyond reasonable doubt, and satisfy all parties as to the propriety of the undertaking. If the gold fields prove extensively attractive, it might be wise to proceed quickly with such a work; and I should regret having caused by my hesitation any obstacle in the way of colonising the interior of the Province. On the other hand, I am not prepared with my present information to be a party to incurring a debt which would cripple the resources of the Province, if its now unsettled districts should soon be cut off.

I have, &c.,

J. P. ROBINSON,

Superintendent.

P.S.—I enclose copy of the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee of the Provincial Council.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Auckland,
August 26, 1863.

His Honor

The SUPERINTENDENT,

Nelson.

SIR,—I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 14th instant, in which your Honor encloses a copy of Resolutions passed by the Provincial Council of Nelson in favor of the construction of a Railway into the interior of the Province, and the raising a loan of £300,000 for the pur-

pose. Your Honor further suggests that His Excellency should be advised to suspend his judgment on the Resolutions for a time, as the lapse of a few months or even weeks will probably determine whether there are gold fields in the districts to be opened by the Railway of sufficient extent and value to justify the proposed outlay, and will also place the public in possession of such an increase of knowledge as to the mineral capabilities of the district in other respects, and the quantity and quality of the lands to be made accessible, as may satisfy all parties of the propriety of the undertaking.

After a careful perusal of the Report of the Council and the evidence taken by the Select Committee of the Provincial Council, as well as of the debates in the Council, and the discussions on the subject at public meetings and in the public prints, I am compelled to conclude that the advisability of contracting so large a loan for the Railway is at present, to say the least, very questionable.

It certainly appears to me that the advocates of the Railway, who advance many undeniable generalities as to the advantages of railways, do not succeed when they set themselves to measure in figures those of the one proposed, in showing that the latter are an equivalent for what must be set off against them, viz:—the large original outlay; the cost of working the railway and keeping it in repair; and the payment of so large an annual interest on the borrowed capital. With every disposition to take a hopeful view of the matter, and to admit the correctness of the estimates of the extent and value of the lands to be made accessible, formed by those most favorable to the project, I cannot think that it has yet been shown that there is much probability that the increase of revenue of any kind to be produced by the Railway would for many years equal the interest that would have to be paid on the loan. But surely, unless this could be satisfactorily shown, Government would not be justified by any representations, however forcible, of the general results of Railways in other countries and under different circumstances, in saddling so large a debt upon the people of Nelson. If indeed the Provincial Government had other revenues of its own, amply sufficient to guarantee its ability to meet these additional liabilities, the case would be different. But apart from the revenue, direct or indirect, to arise from the Railway, an approximation to the amount of which at all events ought to be attainable in figures, it does not appear that the Province of Nelson has any revenue sufficient for this purpose.

If there be any reasonable grounds for these conclusions, then I think it must be admitted that if a debt of such magnitude is to be saddled on the Province, other ways of spending £300,000 to its more immediate and greater advantage might probably be devised. If anything like that sum, for instance, were judiciously expended in due proportions for the introduction of immigrants, and the making the districts best adapted for immediate settlement easily accessible from the natural outlets for the produce of such districts, I believe the benefit to the Province as a whole would be incomparably greater.

If the main object, however, is to prevent the possible separation of the western portion of the Province from Nelson by making Nelson the outlet for the produce of the Buller and Grey districts, I do not think there is any evidence to show that such a reversal of the ordinary results of the

natural configuration of the country could be brought about by this or any other railway.

The Government, therefore, have no hesitation in acceding to your Honor's request, that no decision in favor of this project should be come to until an opportunity has been afforded for acquiring the additional information, alluded to by your Honor, especially as the influx of a large body of gold diggers would most materially alter the whole aspect of the question.

I need scarcely say in conclusion that the fact of the nearly equal division of opinion in the Provincial Council, and apparently in the public of Nelson, for and against the scheme, is a strong confirmation of the prudence of adopting the course suggested by your Honor.

I have, &c.,

ALFRED DOMETT.