

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

WEDNESDAY, 9 JUNE 1869

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would have to stand. It was not the first time this question had been brought before the House, and the want of proper furniture was really becoming a nuisance. He did not know whether the honorable member representing the Government had taken any steps in the matter; but, as he was a member of the same committee, and was aware of the inconvenience which had arisen, he would probably do so.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said a similar objection had been made at the last sitting of the House, by the Honorable the President, and he (Mr. Douglas) had communicated with the Minister for Works on the subject. The present arrangements were of the most temporary character, but it was intended to supply suitable furniture for the committee-rooms, and he believed it was already ordered. The number of chairs could very easily be increased, and he was not aware that any absolute inconvenience in that respect had arisen. It must be patent to honorable members that it was not desirable to incur any great expense for furniture of a temporary character. He believed he was correct in stating that steps were being taken to have the rooms properly fitted up.

The PRESIDENT said he might inform the House that it was his intention to call together, as soon as possible, the Joint Parliamentary Building Committee, and when they met, he intended to submit to them a report, to be brought before both Houses of Parliament, on this question. It was quite evident that Parliament ought to be able to find proper accommodation for its select committees; and he hoped when the report came up honorable members would support him.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Wednesday, 9 June, 1869.

Furniture of Committee-rooms—Question of Privilege.—
Telegraphic Communication to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

FURNITURE OF COMMITTEE-ROOMS— QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE.

The Hon. E. I. C. BROWNE said he wished to call the attention of the House to the deficient accommodation provided in the Legislative Council committee-rooms. He had just come from No. 1 committee-room, where he had attended a sitting of the joint committee on the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum, of which he was a member. That committee was composed of eight members, and all the accommodation provided for them was a bare table, and, for a committee of eight, seven chairs; no accommodation for the shorthand writer; no chairs for witnesses or the public, who had, if not the right, usually the privilege, of being present. He thought it was very desirable that they should have that privilege. At present, if they attended, they

TELEGRAPH COMMUNICATION TO THE GULF OF CARPENTARIA.

The Hon. H. S. HARDEN moved, pursuant to notice—

1. That in the opinion of this House, and in view of the probable extension, by submarine cable, of telegraphic communication to the northern shores of Australia, it is desirable that no delay should occur in constructing a line of telegraph from Cardwell to the settlements on the Gulf of Carpentaria.

2. That the foregoing resolution be transmitted to the Legislative Assembly for their concurrence.

He thought honorable members would agree with him that this was a question of great importance, not only to Queensland, but to the neighboring colonies. It was scarcely necessary for him to point out the many advantages which would arise from uniting with the shores of Queensland the Anglo-Indian telegraph line of communication. That could be done, he thought, more economically, by extending the line to the northern

shores of this colony, than in any other way. He believed there was a proposition on foot, in South Australia, to form a company for the purpose of constructing a telegraph line from Port Augusta, in Western Australia, to the North-west Cape. He had noticed, a short time ago, a letter which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* written by Mr. Cracknell, superintendent of telegraphs in New South Wales, in which that gentleman expressed his opinion that a line could be made much more readily and economically by the north of Queensland than by any other route. The line from King George's Sound to the North-west Cape covered a distance of two thousand five hundred and sixty miles; and a line from the North-west Cape to Cape Ledacca, which would be eight hundred miles, would cost £409,600. That gentleman estimated that, supposing the line to go by North Queensland—taking the distance from the Albert River to Cambridge Gulf to be eight hundred and thirty miles, and from Cambridge Gulf to Cape Ledacca nine hundred miles—a line could be constructed for £324,600, which would show a saving of £84,500. The working expenses of a line *via* Queensland would also be much less. The working cost of a line by way of Western Australia was estimated at £20,300 per annum, while the annual working expenses, *via* Queensland, were put down at £8,100, showing a saving of £12,200 in favor of the line by North Queensland. He thought Mr. Cracknell's remarks on this subject, considering the experience that gentleman possessed, were worthy of consideration, and that his statements could be fully relied upon. He believed that, independently of the saving of expense in the construction and working of that line, the Queensland traffic would be greatly in excess of the traffic to Western Australia. Nearly the whole of the 2,560 miles from Port Augusta to the North-west Cape, would go through an uninhabited country, and besides the advantages which would accrue from connecting the Anglo-Indian line of telegraph communication with the shores of this colony, it was probable that a large population would soon be formed in North Queensland, in consequence of the gold discoveries in that direction, and a direct telegraph line to the Gulf of Carpentaria, would soon pay the outlay upon it. He merely wished to submit these resolutions to the Council, for their opinion, and as the question was unquestionably one of great importance, he hoped honorable members would express their views in connection with it.

The Hon. T. L. M. PRIOR said he felt sure honorable members would feel obliged to the honorable gentleman who had introduced those resolutions, and although he did not entirely agree with him in bringing them forward at the present time, yet, as he

had had something to do with the telegraph lines of this colony, and had taken great interest in the subject, while he was the representative of the Government in the Council, would offer a few remarks before the honorable Postmaster-General addressed the House. There could be no doubt that this question was one of great importance to Queensland. He foresaw that the Victorian and South Australian colonies would do all they could to have telegraphic communication to their own doors, and if it came by way of Torres Straits, it would have to go through the other colonies first, which they would not like. On the other hand, this colony, although the youngest of the group, had already pushed her telegraph communication a long way. A line of telegraph was, he believed, already in course of construction to Cardwell, and, as far as he could learn, was likely to be completed at the end of this year, or the beginning of the next. Honorable members might not, perhaps, be aware that when Cardwell was reached, there would then be something like 450 miles to the Norman River, and this line would be necessary to connect Queensland with the Anglo-Indian line of telegraph communication. He had been in hopes that this matter would have been mooted by one of the other colonies. It was a grave question whether this colony had at present the means to embark in such an undertaking; and he would, therefore, recommend his honorable friend to withdraw his motion for the present, on the understanding that the representative of the Government, in that House, should enter into negotiations as soon as possible with the European telegraph companies, to see what arrangements could be made to connect this colony with their lines of communication. He believed this would be to the advantage of the whole country, and he could only say that any steps taken in that direction would have his most cordial support. But at present, as the cost of the proposed line could not be ascertained, and as the Government were in a better position to obtain information on the subject, he thought if the House were pledged to an expression of opinion that such an undertaking was necessary, it would save time if the honorable member withdrew his motion until the proper authorities had been communicated with, and it had been ascertained whether the Indian and European companies would join in laying down a cable to some point on the Australian coast, provided this country defrayed the expense of communication through the Australian colonies. He need not dilate upon the many advantages which such a line of telegraph communication would open to this colony. He believed a project was now mooted to construct a direct line from Java to Exmouth Gulf, but he questioned whether the Government of South Australia would care to join in that undertaking; whereas

Queensland had already telegraph wires to within 450 miles of the northern coast, and was in a better position to complete the line of communication. It had been stated that there were difficulties in the way of laying down a submarine cable between Java and Timor, but he believed there were none near the coast; and the distance from the east end of Timor to this colony had been surveyed by the "Salamander," and there was no impediment, so far, and any person looking at the map would see that the telegraph should go to Timor, thence to Torres Straits, and thence by a cable along the coast to join the Norman River. The cost of construction, as far as he could make out, for the 450 miles between Cardwell and the Norman River, would not exceed £30,000, and the track which had been discovered was a very good one; and he believed, by a little diversion, it might take in the Gilbert gold fields, and the cost of construction, allowing £30 for timber and £30 for wires, would be about £60 per mile; and there could be no doubt that money expended in this way would be well spent, because telegraph lines were generally self-supporting, and he believed this line would certainly be so. He would suggest for the serious consideration of the Government, that they should collect statistics, and obtain all the information they could on the subject. If he thought this colony was in a position to commence such an undertaking at once, no one would be more ready to support it than he would; but he feared the colony was not at present in that position, and he thought it would be better if the matter was initiated by the Government. He was sure, however, that the discussion of the subject would be of great advantage.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he was indebted to the honorable gentleman who had moved those resolutions. The question was one which he thought the Council might very well take into consideration, and he would not take upon himself to say that it was desirable to withdraw the resolutions. He saw no reason why the House in affirming their opinion in favor of this undertaking, although they could not by such action authorise the Government to spend money in carrying it out, should not strengthen the hands of the Government, and put them in a position to take the necessary preliminary steps. He was of opinion that no time should be lost in meeting a question of so much importance. He was aware that there were several propositions on foot to connect this country with the lines of European telegraph communication, *viâ* Western Australia, and that the Governments of Victoria and South Australia had been in communication with a representative of some European Telegraph Company on the subject. There also appeared to be little doubt that a submarine cable would be laid down through the Straits, and that the telegraph communication between England and India would be placed upon a better

footing, and then Ceylon would be in direct communication with Europe. Then came the question, how were the people of Australia to connect themselves with the mother-country? The most direct way would be from Ceylon to Western Australia. But it was merely a question of expense, and it was more than probable that as the China line must be carried to Java, it would be found more economical to make the connection at that point. The next question was, to what point of the Australian coast should the cable be laid? The first proposition was, that it should go to Cape York; then it was proposed to bring it to the Gulf of Carpentaria; and another proposition—which seemed to be considered the most suitable—was, to bring it to Cambridge Gulf. The distance between the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cambridge Gulf was only about eight hundred miles, and the different Governments of Australia might combine to pay for that link in the chain of communication; if not, the expense would have to be borne by the two colonies most interested in it. He quite agreed with the honorable member, Mr. Harden, that the construction of this line would, in any case, devolve upon Queensland; but he found that the estimates given by the Superintendent of Telegraphs was much less than that given by the honorable member. He could assure him that the extension to Norman River would not exceed £22,000, which was not a large sum considering the immense advantages it would insure to this colony. It must be borne in mind that all the wire and insulators would have to be sent for from England, and, as that would cause some considerable delay, and the orders would take some time to execute, he did not think they would be going very far wrong in so far anticipating the expenditure as to order them at once. He thought it was desirable that the Legislature of Queensland should show that they were in earnest in their intention of carrying out this scheme, if they were to act in concert with the other colonies; and, apart from that, looking to the anticipated large increase of population in the northern part of Queensland, it was highly necessary to open up more direct communication with that part of the colony. It would be impossible to carry out even a rudimentary form of government for those distant places without some regular communication, by this means. At present there was no certainty of getting an answer to a private letter, sent to that part of the country, in less than three months. Telegraph communication was, in fact, already become a necessity, and, in the event of the northern districts becoming a separate colony, the cost of the work might be charged to them. Therefore, independently of the advantage of being in direct communication with the mother-country, there were urgent reasons for extending the telegraph lines to the northern coast.

The question was put and passed.