

The effect of Sir Julius Vogel having ordered so large a number as 25,000 has been that the order which we subsequently sent of 13,000 will be executed at a very early period during the year, so that the whole 13,000 will soon be in the colony: the last shipment of that number will leave probably before the end of the year. I may state that the Government think it a matter of very great importance that a regular stream of immigration should be kept up, but that we should most carefully avoid introducing more persons than we are sure can find work readily. A small but regular stream of immigration, selected with great care, is what we now want. It is, I think—it certainly is to me—a matter of very great surprise that we have up to the present time succeeded in finding work for the very large numbers that we have introduced. I must confess to the House that I had some little doubt, or rather I had some little anxiety, for the last winter; and it is a matter, I think, for very great rejoicing, that nowhere in the colony has there been any lack, at very high wages, of work during last winter. The honorable member for Dunedin City yesterday wished to read a paper to this House—a resolution come to by some men who call themselves “the unemployed in Dunedin.” Of course, a statement of this sort going abroad, where the real facts would be unknown, would do more or less damage to this colony; and it is desirable that we should state what are the real facts as regards Dunedin. By information which I received of a reliable character, it appears that this meeting was got up by two or three perfectly worthless persons, and was attended by a few very worthless persons, and by a large number of persons who went to see what they called “the fun.” The meeting was very rowdy. That expression, I am informed, correctly describes it. It was so unruly that the reporters left; they did not stop to report the meeting. To show that there has been absolutely no truth in the statement put forth, this is a report which I have received to-day from the Immigration Officer at Dunedin. I will read the whole telegram:—

“I did not consider so-called meeting of unemployed of sufficient importance to report to you. Meeting got up by Grant, McLaren, and Powditch, well-known demagogues in Dunedin. Majority of those at the meeting were not the unemployed; they attended to have some fun. The meeting was so rowdy that the reporters left. The demand for labour can be judged by following facts:—The ‘Wai-mea’ arrived on 18th September, with 267 adults; ‘Invercargill’ on the 30th September, with 377 adults; all are now employed except 26½ adults in the dépôt to-day, who will be at work on Monday.”

Now, Sir, I think we may fairly judge of the worthlessness of the statement put forth. About 600 people—new comers—readily obtained work. After this, will any one credit the statement that in Dunedin men cannot obtain work in the course of a month. It is necessary that we should, as far as possible, contradict these rumours whenever we get an opportunity. Sir, I am sorry to have troubled the House at such length, but the subject is very important. Although it was necessary to quote so many figures and facts, I trust they will be useful to the House. It is necessary to go a little into this matter in order that the House may know really what has been done, and what we propose to do. I trust honorable gentlemen will express their views as to the desirability of the numbers, both for the colony, and also for the various provinces, in order that the Government, if the House does not approve of the course it has taken, may receive some instruction in the matter. Before I sit down, I shall have to ask the Committee for an advance of £50,000 over and above what we proposed to ask. The difference has arisen in this way: with the order we sent Home we said—13,000 to be sent out during this year; and Sir Julius Vogel read it as 13,000 adults, so that we shall really receive during the year about 15,000, and the amount asked is about the difference that it will be necessary to take in order to cover the cost of their introduction. I move, That you leave the chair for the purpose of going into Committee of Supply.