

No. 30.

COPY of a DESPATCH from Governor GREY to the Right Hon. Earl GREY.

(No. 5.)

MY LORD,—

Wellington, 9th January, 1851.

My Despatch No. 135, of the 27th December last, will have made your Lordship acquainted with the fact that several of the settlers at Nelson had addressed a petition to your Lordship stating that they had been made aware, by an announcement from Lord John Russell in the House of Commons on the 13th of May last, that it was the intention of Her Majesty's Government, in the course of next session, to introduce a Bill into Parliament for the establishment of representative Government in New Zealand, and that they earnestly requested that the introduction of the proposed measure might be for a short period delayed until they had an opportunity afforded them of making known to your Lordship their views and wishes on this important subject.

2. I yesterday received from Nelson an account of the proceedings of a public meeting which had been held there for the purpose of taking this subject into consideration, and at which the thirteen* enclosed resolutions were carried. [These resolutions will be found printed at page 74, Enclosure 1 in No. 31, as enclosed in Sir George Grey's Despatch No. 15, of the 29th January, 1851.]

3. I understand that this public meeting was numerously attended, that it lasted for many hours, and was conducted with the greatest decorum; so that the resolutions emanating from it are entitled to all the weight which can be given to the decisions of a public meeting on such a subject; although it cannot be forgotten that in such public assemblies resolutions are only carried by the majority of those who may be able or willing to attend, and that when they relate to the questions involved in such a difficult subject as that of the form of Government which should be introduced into so peculiarly circumstanced a country as this is, which questions but very few of the persons attending the meeting can have had either the time or opportunity to consider with reference to the whole of New Zealand, it is difficult to think that, however well-informed and eloquent the speakers themselves may be, that they can, in so short a time as the duration of a public meeting, teach to so large an assemblage things of such great difficulty in so perfect a manner that the majority should be certain to justly decide the several questions submitted to them.

4. As a vessel is to sail direct for England in a few days, and I am uncertain when I may receive officially a copy of these resolutions, I have thought it better, in order that no delay may take place, to transmit to your Lordship a Nelson newspaper (*Nelson Examiner*, 21st December, 1850), which contains the thirteen resolutions alluded to, with the following report upon these resolutions.

5. Upon the first resolution I do not think it necessary to make any remark.

6. One part of the second resolution is to this effect: That the Governor (who it is proposed should be appointed by the Crown) should be removed on a vote for an Address to the Crown, praying for such removal, being passed by two-thirds of the whole number of members of each House.

7. At present I presume that if such a large proportion of both legislative bodies prayed the Crown to remove a Governor there can be no doubt that, unless the conduct of the Governor was such as to merit and require the approbation of the Crown and his country, the Address of the legislative bodies would be favourably entertained, and the Governor would be removed accordingly; and I should have thought that this would have been the best footing on which to leave the question. To pass into law the resolution carried by the public meeting at Nelson would be to enact that, although a Governor appointed by the Crown was acting in the most meritorious manner and in accordance with his duty to the Crown and the empire, and in such a manner as to have and to merit the approbation of Parliament, still that, upon the carrying of an Address by a certain proportion of the colonial Legislature, the Crown would be compelled to be the instrument of inflicting disgrace and punishment upon an officer who might deserve its favour and protection.

8. It is more than probable that, in a country with such a peculiar population as this has, and which must for some years be dependent upon assistance from Great Britain for the repression of internal outrage, questions will arise in which the interests of Great Britain will be opposed to the wishes of perhaps a temporary large majority in the Assemblies. Such questions will chiefly be connected with the Native race, the mode of dealing with their lands, the reduction of the military force serving in the country, the entering upon a war with the Native race, &c. If, therefore, the remarks I have above made have any force as applied to colonial dependencies generally, they have still greater force as applied to New Zealand in particular.

9. Upon the third resolution I have only to remark that, relating as it does to the General Legislature of New Zealand and not to the Provincial Legislatures, I think the General Legislature should be elected for a longer period than two years, and that it should not be necessarily required to assemble every year whether the requirements of the country rendered it necessary to convene it or not.

10. Upon the fourth and fifth resolutions I have only to remark that I do not think that universal suffrage and vote by ballot are at present suited to the very peculiar circumstances of this country.

11. The sixth and seventh resolutions do not appear to require any particular observations.

12. The eighth resolution, in the form in which it stands, I hardly understand. It simply states that the powers of the colonial Parliament shall be absolute in all local matters. In this country I do not think that Great Britain can for some years to come divest herself of certain duties. She cannot, for example, allow a war of races (to end in the extermination of one race or the other) to arise. If ever the British Government are led, by any undertaking on the part of the colonists to defend themselves, to withdraw the entire military force from this country, my opinion is that, if this step is hurriedly and inconsiderately taken, such a war of races will arise, and Great Britain, from motives of humanity and of duty to the people from whom she accepted the sovereignty of the country, must again interfere, and that at a greatly enhanced cost of men and money. So long then as Great Britain has this pecuniary interest in the country I do not see how she can renounce all control over the management of its internal affairs.

*The resolutions eventually carried were ten, and are those enclosed in No. 15, of 29th January, 1851. There were several meetings held at which resolutions were discussed, and the one referred to in this despatch is evidently one anterior to that at which the resolutions were finally decided on.