

5. I remarked that when Ministers made this application they must have had one of two objects in view: they must either wish such an amount of debating-power as would enable them to place their measures fully before the Legislative Council, or they must aim at giving the Government a preponderance of votes in that Chamber. If the first is their desire, then, I said, I hoped they would accept my proposal, though it gave them less than they asked for; for, I said, I need hardly point out that in an assembly of forty-five members (which would be the number with the addition I proposed) an accession of nine skilled debaters, added to the five supporters Government already had, would be amply sufficient to insure the Government measures that respectful consideration which is their due. If the latter is their wish, I said, they will not accept my offer. If it is so, I would much regret that, so soon after my arrival, I should be obliged to decline a proposal made me by my Ministers; but I felt that, if I granted it, I should be running the risk of making the Legislative Council a mere echo of the other House: if it is to have no opinion of its own it is of no use; but if it continues to preserve its liberty, and gives the country time to reconsider such questions as may not have received due consideration, it may, at a critical time, be of invaluable service to the colony. I therefore felt bound to take the course I had announced, as granting a larger number might have the effect of destroying the independence of one of the two Chambers, which I am bound by the Constitution to uphold.

6. The Premier declined to admit that my definition of the possible objects of Ministers was the correct one. He said there was a third alternative, which was the correct one, and that the number I proposed was not sufficient. It was large enough to exasperate the Opposition, but not large enough to be "of any use"—a statement which confirmed me in my opinion that what the Government really requires is a majority in the Legislative Council, and that I was right in my definition.

7. Both Mr. Ballance and Sir Patrick Buckley said that many of their supporters are opposed to a bicameral system, although they themselves are not, and that if nothing is done to improve the position of matters in the Upper House, and if a cry is got up for the abolition of the Legislative Council, it would be so strong that it would bear down all opposition. I replied that Ministers were holding out to me, as an alternative, an emasculated Upper House or none at all; but that I was bound to uphold, as far as I could, the Constitution of the country. I said I was making them an offer not much less than what they desired, and repeated that an addition of nine would give them a sufficient number to place their policy properly before the Council. I added that the question of bringing the two Houses into harmony, which I believed would be the practical upshot if I granted the application of Ministers, could not arise until the Chambers declined to give effect to the result of an appeal to the country, and that had not yet happened.

8. Mr. Ballance undertook to communicate my decision to the Cabinet, and in the afternoon he informed me that he had done so; that they considered an addition of nine to the Legislative Council worse than useless, and that they cannot therefore accept it; that they will reintroduce into Parliament the measures that were not passed last session, and if they are not carried they will appeal to the country.

9. Your Lordship will observe that my especial difficulty has been this: that I have not had at my disposal any means of ascertaining the exact amount of nominations that could have been given without altering the balance of parties in the Upper House, and that I had therefore no alternative but to take up the position of, and act on the information supplied me by, my predecessor. I felt this so much that I said to Mr. Ballance that, if he cordially concurred in the step, I would send for the leader of the Opposition in the Council and ask him to tell me frankly if the number required by Ministers would imperil his majority. Mr. Ballance replied that it would make a precedent of an unusual character (which I admitted, remarking that the occasion was an unusual one), and said that the Opposition leader would be bound to give no reply that would please the Government.