

received more concessions than it has done. I was in great hopes that this Conference, speaking unitedly and with one voice, would have been able to bring sufficient pressure upon the Imperial Post Office and the companies contracting to enable us, if we did extend the contract to a period of three years, to gain almost if not all the concessions we asked for, whereas we are driven to renew the contract without receiving any concessions, or receiving only the most paltry conditions. I deeply regret this; at the same time I feel, as Dr Cockburn put it, we are coerced by our "senior partner" into adopting this course, by the Imperial Post Office taking up the position which it has taken up and maintained throughout this controversy. There was a great deal to be said for these Colonies, who felt themselves bound, owing to circumstances, to follow the lead thus given. The only consolation to my mind is that this resolution of Mr Cook's (which I trust will be carried) gives fair notice and fair warning to all concerned that if these Colonies, at the expiration of the extended period, are again to enter into a Federal Mail Contract for carrying our postal matter, it is to be only upon the adoption of the terms and conditions we have laid down. Some years ago I had hoped that when the period of the termination of the present contract arrived we should be able to do as the Hon. Mr Fysh had suggested, without any future subsidies whatever. I had hoped this, and now, if this contract is to be renewed for three years, I do still hope at the end of that time we shall be in a position not to give any subsidies to the steamers that carry our letters. Let them take them at moderate poundage rates in the same way that the Imperial Post Office sends its mail matter to America. I do trust that if we continue to subsidise we shall be able to get some *quid pro quo*. I trust we will be in a position to say that we require all the concessions asked for at the Wellington Conference, and that matters will be in such a condition that there will be a certainty of obtaining all, or substantially all, the requests we have made. At present I feel we are in a difficulty; we are bound and shackled hand and foot. It is most difficult for us to move in the matter in any satisfactory manner. If we desire simply to renew the contract for two years, it is self-evident there will be no likely chance of any shipping company tendering, we will be therefore completely in the hands of the contracting companies. If we endeavoured, instead of calling for tenders for two years, to bring about fresh contracts for a further period of seven or ten years, the Imperial Post Office might at once say, "We will not fall in with this arrangement, if you are determined to have a mail service of your own you must pay for such mail service." This is the difficulty we are in, and I may say that, as far as I am concerned, on the part of Victoria, if it stood alone, I would be willing to take the risk. But Victoria is only one of the Australian Colonies, and all the Australian Colonies, except New Zealand, are interested in this federal mail service, and the whole of Australia is only a junior partner in the whole concern. I am not prepared to do anything but what I must do, and do unwillingly and painfully, that is, fall in with the general expression as conveyed in this resolution of Mr Cook's—"that he desires to express his disappointment"—for it is a bitter disappointment we all must feel at the action of the Imperial Post Office in this matter. I regret we have not some easier means of communicating with them than by letter or telegram. I should like to meet them here face to face, and thus bring forcibly under their notice our requirements and needs in this matter. (Hear, hear. They talk about our being insulated they take up a position of inaccessibility there is no moving them—no stirring them. My hon. friend the Premier of Western Australia is a mere reed compared with them, although I believe he has a little will of his own. (Laughter. When once the Imperial Post Office take up an idea they never seem to lose it again. They always look at things from one point of view, the view of the Imperial Post Office, when regarding the wants and wishes of the Australian Colonies, which after all are more concerned than the Imperial Post Office can be. I have said the concessions are paltry which they are giving us. One of the concessions we have practically already obtained, the other only refers to parcels post which, although an important matter in some of the Colonies, is of a paltry description as compared with the concessions for which we asked. The idea seems to have obtained that as the Imperial Post Office was desirous of extending the contract to 1898, it was with a view of taking advantage of that being the period of the termination of the India and China contract to hook us on in the old-fashioned way in which we used to be hooked on, and not to assist us in getting a through mail service. I am happy to say they have acknowledged they have no such intention. I have received a telegram from the Government of Victoria which embodies the letter sent by Mr. Buxton Forman, in which he assures the Agent-General of Victoria that when the new tenders are called for in 1898 there will be no attempt to hook on Australia with the China and India service. It is satisfactory to know that this idea has no foundation in fact, and that we shall get a through mail service of our own. Besides that telegram I have received another, presumably from the Agent-General of South Australia, which is I think the telegram which Mr Cook has read. If this telegram means that the Imperial authorities really do desire to meet the wishes of the Colonies, of course that would be satisfactory as far as it goes. I only regret that having said so much they are going to give way upon two points only. They say they are going to write to us shortly as regards sections 3, 4, and 5, and take no notice whatever of the remaining recommendations of the Wellington Conference. If they had intended to give way I think this telegram would have been worded differently. I am afraid under the circumstances we are driven into a corner. We can only hope for the best, that is, when the letter comes it will be more satisfactory than the former correspondence has been. I do hope that this matter of new contracts will be fully discussed and satisfactorily settled two years hence, which will allow one year to get new tenders out, and that when a future Conference comes to discuss this matter all the Colonies will be able to speak with a united voice, and bring forcibly before the Imperial authorities and the contracting