

INTERNATIONAL TELEGRAPH CONFERENCE.

No. 1.

REPORT.

THE International Telegraph Conference met in London in May, June, and July, 1903. New Zealand was represented by the Agent-General for the colony and Mr. Mackay, one of the delegates of the British Post Office. The following are the results of the discussion of some of the more important matters brought forward:—

Extract from the Report of the British Delegates to the International Telegraph Conference of London, 1903.

Tariffs.—The British proposal for a reduction of the rates of European States for extra-European telegrams to the level of those charged for European telegrams was the principal subject for discussion in relation to tariffs. The justice of the proposal, in view of the reductions already made by the cable companies and extra-European administrations, was generally admitted; but almost all the large European States declared their inability to agree to it, on account of the heavy financial loss which it would involve. When put to the vote after a long discussion in the “Commission des Tarifs” the proposal was rejected by 14 to 10.

A proposition of Belgium was then discussed for a more moderate reduction. This proposition, as modified at the suggestion of the British delegation, was for a reduction from 20 centimes terminal and 20 centimes transit in the case of the large States to 15 centimes and 12 centimes respectively, and from 10 centimes terminal and 10 centimes transit in the case of the small States to 10 centimes and 8 centimes respectively. This proposition was carried by 18 votes against 6, many of the States obviously feeling that it furnished them an opportunity of meeting to some extent the views of the British administration. When the matter came up for confirmation in full Conference, the German delegation declared that, owing to the heavy financial loss which the reduction would impose on Germany without a corresponding benefit to the German public, they were compelled to offer *opposition formelle*, which practically amounts to a veto. They stated that they were ready to reduce their terminal and transit rates in cases where reductions had been or would be made to the public, as, for instance, on telegrams to South Africa, but that they could not agree to make a reduction on other classes of telegrams, notably those exchanged with North America. In view of this declaration of Germany, it was recognised to be impossible to make the reduced rates obligatory for all States.

Two alternative proposals were then put forward—one by Belgium for making the reduction optional, the other by the British delegation for expressly exempting Germany from the obligation to charge the reduced rate, and thus putting her practically in the same position as Russia and Turkey. The British proposition being the most radical was taken as the basis of discussion. After prolonged debate, in the course of which France, Spain, Austria, and Hungary demanded the same freedom as Germany, the British alternative proposition was carried, subject to the inclusion of the four countries in question in the list of exceptions.

The delegates of Austria and Hungary gave us to understand that if the cable companies would co-operate in a reduction of the rate between Austria-Hungary and North America from 1 franc 70 centimes to 1 franc 50 centimes they would agree to be bound to the reduced terminal and transit rates, and withdraw from the list of exceptions. After a great deal of trouble we succeeded in securing from the companies the desired reduction, and at the final sitting of the Conference Austria and Hungary withdrew their names from the list, with the result that all the States of Europe are now bound to charge the reduced rates except Germany, France, and Spain—in addition, of course, to Russia and Turkey, which have never been subject to normal rates either for European or extra-European telegrams.

This is a considerable advance in the direction of assimilation, and it will add to the earnings of the cable companies on telegrams exchanged between countries on the Continent, and Africa, Asia, and Australasia, and thus pave the way for future reductions of charge in favour of the public.

Rules and Regulations.—As regards the rules and regulations, we found it a difficult task to withstand the proposals formulated by France, Belgium, and Japan (and supported by other States) for making obligatory the use of the Official Vocabulary prepared by the International Bureau. After prolonged discussions in the Conference, many special meetings with the cable companies, and separate negotiations with the delegates of the principal States, we succeeded in getting the decision of the Buda-Pesth Conference rescinded. But this is not all. We got the regulations entirely altered, so as to sanction the use of practically all existing codes and the formation of fresh codes in the manner desired by the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and other important commercial bodies. The arbitrary distinction between words (however recondite or uncouth) in the eight specified languages, and artificial words easy to pronounce and transmit, was swept away, and the new rule is as follows:—

“VIII.—1. Code-language is that which is composed of words not forming intelligible phrases in one or more of the languages authorised for telegraphic correspondence in plain language.

“2. Words, which may be real or made up, must be composed of syllables that can be pronounced according to the usage of one of the German, English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, or Latin languages.