

about Reefton estimated at 2,500 — If crushing good [population] may increase before winter to 4,000 and ultimately to any amount. The road work is the most important matter.... Weather down the Buller and last night frightful — Sea making steady inroads a great part of town perhaps all will go by degrees....¹¹ and again, on the same date: 'Have carefully inspected roads from Greymouth to Westport — It is of the utmost importance that the connecting line between the two rivers should be pushed on without delay — Famine prices not to say starvation of 3000 to 4000 people may be the consequence if any delay — the great thing is to get drays through to Reefton from Buller landing on one side and Ahaura on other — Mr Dobsons specifications are ready for much of the work and will very soon be for the whole.... I recommend that very much be left to his discretion so that not an hour be lost in pushing on the indispensable work....'¹²

Fox, with his wife and Secretary, was due to arrive in Hokitika on 24 February.¹³ The newspaper editorial called for a welcome: 'Here we have had, for some forty-eight hours, the Prime Minister of New Zealand amongst us, and yet his advent has excited no more attention than if he had been an individual of ordinary importance only.... Mr Fox betook himself to Government House, and there he has remained undisturbed by grievance mongers, in the quiet enjoyment of a repose which must have proved a welcome change after the trying ordeals he has gone through since he has been on the Coast.'¹⁴

On 28 February a deputation did meet the Premier: it consisted of the Mayor of Hokitika, and six councillors, including the redoubtable Cross; the Town Clerk read an address asking for port subsidies, and a railway link between Hokitika and Greymouth. In his reply Fox looked backward to his adventurous youth: 'It was a pleasureable reminiscence that he was the first white man to set foot on the Buller some twenty-five years ago. At that date, looking forward, he might have had a dim prescience that at some future period — perhaps in a hundred years — the country would be inhabited by an industrial population. But he could never have conceived that in so brief a space of time so much would have been done.'¹⁵ The following day, the editorial noted that the lesson of the interview was that Fox had told the deputation to look to self-help for a remedy for the difficulties of the Corporation of Hokitika.¹⁶ And on 4 March Fox left for a visit to 'the southern portion of the County...'¹⁷

The newspaper of 9 March noted that 'the Premier has no particular object in view, but is making a tour with the view of informing himself by personal observation of the requirements of the various districts through which he passes'.¹⁸ Later it commented that he 'will probably be detained in consequence of the rising of the streams. . . we can only come to the conclusion that Mr Fox has roused the ire of Neptune, who