

SECRET

4th January, 1900.

Sir,

I have already had the honour to report for your information some of the more important occurrences of the last three months. I now take this opportunity to add some further observations on recent events.

2. The parliamentary session ended on 28th December, and on the following day a Proclamation was issued proroguing Parliament till the 13th February as already reported in my Despatch NO of 30th December.

3. For various reasons the legislative work of the Session was, with the exception of the Criminal Code Act, of a quite unimportant character. When parliament met in September the government led by Mr Dickson had apparently a good working majority in the Legislative Assembly. When, however, the motion approving the despatch of the first contingent of troops to South Africa was moved, it was only

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

by

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

by an intimation that the carrying of the amendment moved by Mr A Dawson the Leader of the Parliamentary ~~Party~~ Party by which it was proposed to express disapproval of the action of the Government in making the offer of troops without first obtaining Parliamentary sanction would involve the resignation of the Government ~~the~~ defeat of the amendment was secured. It was understood that a majority of the House were prepared to approve the amendment on its merits, but were not then willing to displace the Government. Soon afterwards it became apparent that the disaffection in the ranks of the Government supporters was increasing and before any contentious measures had been dealt with, the Government found themselves obliged to resign. I have already reported the circumstances under which Mr A Dawson By this time the and afterwards Mr Philp assumed office. year was so far advanced that it was impracticable to transact any but formal and necessary business.

4. Mr Dickson's position throughout his tenure of office as Prime Minister, which lasted for a little more



than a year, was a difficult one. When he was commissioned by Lord Lamington to reconstitute the Government on the death of the late Mr T J Byrnes, a considerable number, indeed a majority, of the parliamentary supporters of the Government made no secret of their disapproval of the choice intimating that they preferred Mr Philp should be their leader. That gentleman, however, expressed his disinclination to lead, and his desire to serve under Mr Dickson, and the Session of 1898 was brought to an end without an open attack upon the Government.

5. A General Election followed early in the present year. In the meantime Mr Dickson, who had not previously taken any active part in the advocacy of Australian Federation, had avowed himself a supporter of the movement, and had attended the Meeting of Prime Ministers held in Melbourne in January 1899 at which certain amendments to the Draft Constitution as framed by the Convention were agreed to.

6. A large section of the supporters of the Government in the Southern part of the Colony were strongly opposed to Federation, and there is no doubt that Mr Dickson's advocacy of it was much resented by them, and tended to a disintegration of the Government Party.

7. You are aware that a Special Session of Parliament was held in May for the purpose of passing a Bill for referring the question of the adoption of the Federal Constitution to the Electors. The beginning of the ordinary Session of the year was postponed until after the poll on this question had been taken, with the result that little time was left for legislative work before the close of the year.

8. In the interval Mr Dickson had made the offer to send a contingent to South Africa. The promptitude of his action in this regard met with the disapproval of many of the Government supporters, and tended, I think, to weaken his position.

9. The measures which was the immediate occasion of the resignation of the Dickson Government was regarded by

many



many of the Government Party, both in and out of the Legislature, as an attempt to delegate to a paid Parliamentary Committee responsibilities which should properly be undertaken by the Executive Government. The various influences to which I have referred combine, I think, to bring about the vote which led to the resignation of the Government, the object of the members who made defections from the Government ranks being rather to bring about a change in the leadership than in a change in the Governing party.

10. So far, however, as I can at present observe, the change in leadership has not affected any material alteration in the disposition of parties. It was anticipated that the accession of Mr J G Drake to the Philp Government would have led to the fusion of the Independent Opposition with the Government party. This expectation, however, has not been fulfilled. The remaining members of that Opposition have retained the attitude of opposition, and the seat vacated by Mr Drake has been gained by the Labour Party. I think it right to say in this connection that if I had been aware that

that Mr Drake would bring no accession of political support to the Government I should have hesitated before agreeing to summon him to the Legislative Council.

11. The Government have lost another seat by the return of ~~Mr Drake~~ the Labour Party for the Western Electorate of Warrego in the place of Mr WW Hood unseated on petition. At the close of the Session, however, they had still a majority of about 10 or 12. It is impossible to say what will be the position of parties in the beginning of next Session, but I think that the Parliamentary Labour Party have been encouraged by the mere fact of their recent brief tenure of office to make a strong effort to regain power. I think also that the fact that they have shewn their readiness to accept the responsibilities of office has had the effect of changing the views of many persons who previously regarded them merely as a party of irresponsible obstructions.

12. The manner in which the proposal to send a second detachment of troops to South Africa was received showed



a marked difference from the temper displayed on the former occasion. The circumstance that the resolution was seconded by the leader of the Labour Party who had previously proposed to censure the Government for making the first offer and had in doing so expressed strong disapproval of the offer itself as well as of the time and mode of making it, indicated so gratifying a change of attitude on the part of that Party that I thought it proper to inform you of the fact by telegraph.

13. There is throughout the Colony a strong feeling of loyalty to the Empire. The operations in South Africa are everywhere followed with the keenest interest and sympathy, a feeling which will be intensified by the news just received, of the first casualties sustained by the Queensland contingent.

14. I am glad to be able to report that, notwithstanding the disastrous and long continued drought that still affects nearly the whole of the Western Pastoral Districts, the Treasury Returns for the past six months are satisfac-

satisfactory. The revenue for the six months amounted to £ 2,403,333. being an increase of £259,044 over the amount received during the corresponding period of 1890, while the expenditure reached £2,061,639 as compared with £1,880,031.

In other parts of the Colony the weather has been propitious with the exception of a severe frost which most unseasonably occurred in October, and destroyed a large portion of the wheat crops on the Darling Downs. The general condition of the Colony is distinctly prosperous.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant,