

No. 2.

The Hon. the MINISTER for IMMIGRATION to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Immigration Office, Wellington, 6th November, 1879.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 29th August, No. 753, covering copies of telegrams upon the subject of the change of plan in respect of free immigration which was adopted by the late Government, full particulars of which will have reached you in Mr. Gisborne's letter of the 14th August.

I gather from your letter now under reply, as well as from your subsequent telegrams (copy of which is attached), that the imposition of a charge of £5 per head on each adult male immigrant would not, under existing circumstances, be of itself a sufficient consideration to keep the number of applicants for passages within the limits required by the present powers of absorption by the colony.

Since my predecessor's letter of the 14th August was written it has become more apparent that it will be necessary further to restrict the number of immigrants, and temporarily to suspend even nominated immigration of those who would arrive in the winter months, the exception being that which there has never been reason to interfere with—the despatch of single women.

The Government wishes it to be understood that this suspension is of a temporary character, and with special reference to the season of the year; and it desires effect to be given to it in such a way as will enable immigration to be hereafter resumed with as little difficulty as possible.

From returns and correspondence before me, I learn that between August last and the present time there were immigrants on the way to New Zealand to the number of about 3,687; that about 350 nominated immigrants were coming forward monthly, but that on the whole a much larger number of immigrants than 350 were being despatched monthly, as detailed in the attached statement.

The present Government, on taking office, found that there was a greater scarcity of employment in the colony than had been the case for many years past.

There are 2,411 workmen of different classes now placed by the Government on public works throughout the colony to meet the necessities of the unemployed, and this at a time of the year when ordinarily farming operations would absorb the surplus labour. The Government is accordingly forced to the conclusion that, until the depression consequent on the low prices of wool and grain, and the losses from drought, has been alleviated, it would be unwise to run any risk of aggravating the difficulty now experienced by the working classes in many parts of the country in obtaining employment.

The resumption of immigration, other than that of single women, must also be largely guided, first, by the extent to which the Government will be enabled, by the raising of the loan, to proceed with the prosecution of railway construction and other public works; and, secondly, by the extent to which spontaneous emigration from the Home country is taking place.

On these two points you will be able to form an opinion in advance of that which can be formed by the Government in the colony; and you will hold yourself in readiness to give effect to any modifications of your present instructions which may be sent to you on the revival of trade, or in consequence of any other circumstances which may make it advisable to renew more active operations in this department.

At present, and until it is known whether the prospect of a good harvest will be realized, the instructions contained in the Premier's telegrams (copies of which are attached) will hold good.

With regard to such nominated immigrants as may have had a pledge of assistance before the above telegrams reached you, and have already made their arrangements to come out, the Government will of course keep faith with them.

There may also be cases of an exceptional character—of families closely related to settlers in the colony who are certainly in a position to insure their obtaining immediate employment on arrival, or also of families comprising in their number a large proportion of single women—in respect of which you will use your own discretion; but with regard to all others it will be necessary to postpone for the present the acceptance of their proposals. I have issued instructions to this effect to the Immigration Officers in the colony.

With regard to the class of immigrants now arriving, I may state that, at present, mechanics have great difficulty in obtaining work, and, when the Government has only railway formation to offer, an obvious difficulty arises from giving spade and shovel work to carpenters and blacksmiths. The same does not apply to ordinary labourers or really competent agricultural workmen. I mention this as ruling what should be the line to be taken by you in guiding the course of spontaneous immigration on which your advice will doubtless be sought, and also on the renewal of general immigration.

There can be no doubt that there must be a strong revival of confidence among the agricultural population, and progress in the active work of settlement and cultivation of the lands, before larger commercial enterprise, involving buildings, &c., in the large towns and centres of population, will be entered upon. In connection with this matter I may mention that the Government proposes to ask the Legislature to increase the facilities for settlement on the deferred-payment system. A copy of the Bill embodying its proposals is forwarded herewith.

Under existing circumstances it will be necessary to issue instructions to Mr. G. M. Reed and the other Agents, informing them of the present intentions of the Government, and you are authorized to make any reductions in this branch of the department which can fairly be made, having regard to existing agreements.

Referring to the sailing of the "Wanganui" with a special class of immigrants possessing a small capital, the last paragraph of Mr. Gisborne's letter of the 14th August will have removed any ambiguity which existed in the telegrams of the 15th and 26th August.

I have, &c.,
W. ROLLESTON.

The Agent-General for New Zealand,
London.