The Weekly British Colonist.

Wednesday March 16, 1870

The Confederation Debate.

The great Confederation debate commenced on Wednesday and bids fair to outlive another week. Perhaps its chief novelty is found in the circumstance of the principal officers of the Government standing up as the bold advocates of a cause they formerly opposed or—to give them the full benefit of their explanations—delayed. The Attorney General, on behalf of the Government, 'opened the ball' with a speech which, if not eloquent, was characterised by considerable ability and force of argument. The history of the agitation was briefly traced, the Government case was fairly and frankly stated; and the general advantages of union were contrasted with the disadvantages of isolation with considerable force and perspicuity. The Attorney General was followed by Dr Helmcken, who, in order to be consistent with the past, was inconsistent with the present. Everybody expects the Doctor to be interesting and amusing even when he is quarreling with facts. Those who heard him on Wednesday must have felt that he was conscious of the rottenness of his cause—that he 'spoke his piece' rather than expressed his convictions. The line of argument was as stale as the propositions were fallacious, and although the effort found occasional relief in sallies of wit, it was evidently a sort of forlorn hope. Indeed, if it had not been for the startling allusion to Annexation which it contained, the last great effort of the last great anti-Confederate would have evoked but little interest. The intimation, boldly made by a Cabinet Minister, that there might be another issue besides Confederation submitted to the people at the general election fell like a thunderbolt in the Government ranks, and made the independent supporters of an assumed Confederation administration look very much as if they had been betrayed. It was not an unreasonable request that the House should be informed whether or not the policy of the Government had been correctly forshadowed by one of its members. The House had not long to wait. The debate was resumed on Thursday by the Chief Commissioner in a speech which did credit alike to head and heart. Clear, argumentative and convincing, he carried both the House and the gallery with him, and sat down amidst enthusiastic applause. To say that the Chief Commissioner's speech was the most effective can neither excite jealousy nor inflict wrong. Before his trenchant arguments the 'men of straw' set up by Dr. Helmcken fell like grain before the scythe of the mower. Especially were the advantages of Confederation, as contrasted with those claimed by Annexationists, presented in a clear and forcible light, while he administered a merited and scathing rebuke to those who had offered wanton insult to a people their ignorance of whom could only be exceeded by their impertinence. Mr Holbrook followed in a speech the greatest merit of which consisted in a frank and manly acceptance of the situation. The oration delivered by Mr Wood might have been impressive had the propositions or conclusions been either new or correct. Its chief merit lay in the prefatory admission that, as the speaker claimed to represent no one but himself in the House, he would present his individual opinions for what over they were worth. Oratorical effort is seldom effective when it relies upon a reiteration of stale fallacies. Mr DeCosmos was apparently inspired by an ambition to make a great speech. He succeeded only in making a long one. A great thinker has said that 'Egotism is an infirmity that perpetually grows upon a man, till at last he cannot bear to think of anything but himself, nor even to suppose that others do.' The first half of Mr D Cosmos' speech might be regarded as a striking exemplification of the truth of this maxim. He has been sitting like the fly on the great fly-wheel of Progress, and cries out that it turns at last because he pushed. To do that gentleman full justice, however, the latter half of his tedious harangue contained both point and argument, and would have been better appreciated if it could have been dissociated from the former. To the speeches delivered yesterday we cannot more than merely allude. Mr. King labored, we will not say successfully, to convince himself and the House that the people of Nanaimo were all but unanimously against Confederation. Mr Barnard delivered a most effective speech, and gained the earnest attention and evoked the applause of the House. Mr Dewdney, in a neat and appropriate speech, explained his position, and announced himself a convert to Confederation. Mr Alston delivered a nice little speech, in the course of which he made some excellent points. Dr Carrall rose at the accustomed hour of adjournment drew breath, and although he labored under the disadvantage of addressing a wearied and hungry auditory, the hon gentleman elicited frequent applause by the numerous home-thrusts dealt to the opposition, and threw the House into the best of humor by his repartee. Dr Helmcken rose to explain, and announced his intention of supporting the government terms and asking for more in Committee. Mr Drake bowed gracefully to defeat, and withdrew his amendment; so that, after three days' warm and, for the most part, able discussion, the motion of the Attorney General was carried unanimously!

Saturday, March 12.

Legislative Council.

FRIDAY, March 11th, 1870.

Council met at 1:30 o'clock.

Present—Hon Colonial Secretary in the Chair, and Messrs Crease, DeCosmos, Humphreys, Helmcken, Wood, Drake, Barnard, Hamley, Pemberton, Robson, Carrall, Bushby, Dewdney, O'Reilly, Alston, Sanders, Ball, Ireton, Ring.

Minutes of previous meeting read and adopted.

GAME ORDINANCE.

Mr Dewdney asked leave to introduce a Game Ordinance.

PETITION

Dr Carrall moved that the petition of Mr Eedy be referred to a select committee.

PRIVILEGE.

Mr DeCosmos rose to a question of privilege. The report of his remarks yesterday in the COLONIST was misreported to that extent that he took this opportunity of warning the country against it being received as a report of his speech.

Mr Holbrook said that he rose to make the same complaint. (merriment.)

Hon Attorney General thanked the reporter of the COLONIST for putting some excellent ideas into his mouth. (laughter.)

Hon Chief Commissioner—Hadn't we all better protest. (continued laughter.)

Mr Robson—It is no more than just to the press to say that there is not a printing office on the coast with enough of big I's to print the speeches of a certain hon member. (renewed merriment.)

Mr DeCosmos—If the hon member refers to me, I would say that he made a speech in the council of which no notes were taken, yet the whole of it appeared in the paper next day.

FLORINS.

Mr Holbrook moved for an address to his Excellency asking that provision be made so that the currency of the Island and the Mainland be assimilated, by making the English florin pass as a legal tender at the same value as the American half-dollar piece. Seconded by Mr Robson and lost.

THE SISTERS' ROCKS.

Mr Holbrook moved for an address to his Excellency asking that tenders be advertised for to find out the cost of removing the Sisters' rocks, below Yale. Mr Robson seconded the motion, which was supported by the hon Chief Commissioner and carried.

OFFICERS' ENABLING ACT.

Mr Dewdney's motion for copy of instructions relative to reductions under union, and also all correspondence relating to the Officers' Enabling Act, was carried.

CONFEDERATION.

Mr Ring rose to resume the debate on Confederation.

The Attorney General objected, the hon gentleman having already spoken.

Mr Ring claimed that he had not spoken to the original motion, only to the amendment.

The Chair allowed the hon gentleman to proceed.

Mr Ring commenced by criticising the opening remarks of the hon member for District No 2, and especially where he compared the hon Attorney General to an adulterous woman. He (Mr Ring) was glad of the courage of the hon Attorney General, in these godless times, in asking the blessing of God upon the deliberations of the council. After reviewing certain remarks of the hon Attorney General made when introducing the question of Confederation, he said he had been accused of shirking his duty toward the people of Nanaimo on the matter of Confederation, but the mind of that people was expressed against Confederation, and on the hustings he had promised to give the matter his fullest consideration. Confederation, however, did not enter into the canvass, but their feeling was still against it, as he knew from letters he had received. If there was a petition in favor of Confederation from Nanaimo, he had not heard of it. Confederation should be amply and fully expressed in this House, and there should be a full representation of the people present when it was being discussed. Strike off the political shackles of the people and then let them express their minds by the franchise. Let them have a fair majority in the House and then let them say whether they will have Confederation or not. The hon member, whose state of health is not good, continued at some length, but his remarks were imperfectly heard at the reporter's table.

Mr Barnard—In rising to support the motion of the hon and learned Attorney General I can but express my feelings of pleasure in being permitted to take a part in the great work in hand, that of bewing off the rough corners of the block which has come to us from the hands of the Executive and which, after receiving the finishing touch at the hands of the people, will become the key-stone of the great Confederation Arch which will are 12 months extend from ocean to ocean. The terms as sent down by His Excellency are, I consider, a fair subject of congratulation. The manner in which they have been received by this House and the people is another subject of congratulation, and the paucity and utter idleness of the arguments used by the opposition, represented in this House as it is by the talent of the opposing party in the country, are also subject of congratulation to His Excellency, this House and the country. It is, we all, Mr. President, to charge the desire for Confederation on the part of its promoters to a desire for change. So far as my constituency and the adjoining ones on the Mainland are concerned, I may say safely that such was not the case—we accepted the Organic Act constituting this Council and agreed to work it out to its legitimate end, and we have not countenanced nor have we been subjected to the many changes which other parts of this colony have. I desire, before going further, to allude to a charge commonly made against my countrymen—often offensively put—but yesterday put by the hon Mr Wood in his usual gentlemanly way. It is that of 'Canadian proclivity.' As a native-born Canadian in common with others, I love the land of my birth. We admire her institutions and revere her laws; but we never forget the land of our adoption, and we would no more consent to see her wronged by Canada than would the tens of thousands of Englishmen who have made Canada their home permit a wrong to be done her by England. We desire Confederation with Canada because we believe that it will be to the interest of this colony to unite with the progressive colonies to the east. That they are progressive I assert, and as proof I point to the fact that previous to Confederation Canada proper had expended $184,000,000 on public works, principally in building canals. Up to 1869 $170 000 000 had been expended in railways. She pays to-day $300 000 yearly for her ocean steam mail service alone, and her enterprise is followed by her people. Her manufactures are increasing yearly, and even now she is exporting cloths to England and competing there with cheap labor. One firm composed of men who landed in Canada penniless now has $9,000,000 invested in ocean steamers, employing 4500 men and thus sustaining 22 000 persons. Among the objections urged by hon members to Confederation is our proximity to the United States. This, I hold, is no objection. Canadians are not taught to fear competition with the United States. The general feeling there is that we can hold our own [except in point of numbers] with her in any direction whatever, and it is to her we look for a great portion of our trade, and the advantages of such trade are mutual. The question is often asked: 'What are the immediate benefits to be derived by us from Confederation?' My reply is that in addition to the amount paid us by way of subsidies, we will save by a reduction in the tariff and by importing Canadian manufactures, a very considerable sum, thus reducing our taxation. Next, the terms propose that $1,000,000 be spent on a wagon road to be commenced immediately and completed in three years, thus causing $300,000 a year to be spent. Hon gentlemen will recollect that in '61, '62 and '63 immigration poured in on us caused by the report of rich discoveries in Cariboo and by the knowledge on the part of those coming that the government was spending large sums on public works, and that those who failed in the mines might fall back on the roads to replenish their purses, and many who are now permanent settlers in the interior acknowledge that they made their 'farm stake' there. How much more is this likely to be the case if the larger works contemplated in the terms be carried out. Then, sir, look at the construction of a railway. You may judge of the magnitude of the work by following the figures I propose to find. There were employed on the Central Pacific at one time 25,000 men, and 6000 teams; 600 tons of material were forwarded daily to the point of construction—30 vessels in harbor at one time loaded with material—the wharves at San Francisco and Sacramento loaded with railway iron—70 locomotives landed and 700 cars built to carry on the work on construction account. No less than 30 sawmills in operation at one point, at one time. The enterprise that set this enormous trade in motion is not one of any greater magnitude than will be the work undertaken on this side, and if our farmers and our population generally do not prosper, and that immediately, by the carrying on of such enterprises as these, let them rest on their oars, for I know of no state of prosperity that can help them. I contend the benefits of Confederation, in these respects at least, will be immediate. But hon members have said 'the United States will derive the benefit.' If that argument holds good, why not tell the merchants of Wharf street to close their doors because foreign manufacturers reap a part of the benefit of their trade. Better a great deal for the opponents of this cause to advise the farmers to cultivate every inch of their farms and garner up their crops, for the day assuredly will come when they will have ample market for all they can raise. In the statements of the Dominion we have every confidence. England has the same or she would not commit the well-being of 4 000,000 of her subjects to their care. They can steer the good ship Dominion and hold her on her way. She will receive many a knock, but it will be on the waves and not the rock.

Mr Humphreys said that the most important point connected with this whole question had been left out—perhaps purposely. He referred to *Responsible Government*. He thought it was an insult to the people of this colony to say that they were unable to govern themselves. He had a very vivid idea of the present officials when they first came to this colony and he did not think that they should be allowed to arrogate to themselves the ability of governing the colony to the exclusion of the popular voice. It was necessary that the government of this colony should be placed in the hands of the people. Macauley said 'governments were made for the people not the people for governments.' The hon member thought the officials appeared to be doing all they could to make themselves despised and hated. The popular members were described as having but the shade of a shadow of power. The officials, he believing upon the people. The people of this colony demanded responsible government, and he hoped that responsible government would form the basis of Confederation. When that was granted we might hope to see a new era of prosperity dawn upon the colony. Without it the people would accept no conditions that might be placed before them. He contended that it was a libel on the intelligence of the people of British Columbia to say they were not prepared for self government. The greatest enemies there could be in the colony were those who refused to listen to the demands of an intelligent people. He prophesied that without the condition of responsible government, Confederation would be defeated. [Applause]

Dr Carrall said he was left with almost nothing to say by the hon gentlemen who had preceded him. His views were generally known throughout the colony, but he thought it right and proper that he should say a few words. His principles on Confederation had never changed. He had always believed that the fragments of Empire lying east and west of the Rocky Mountains would be joined under one government, and he hoped to see them all united socially, politically and commercially. He thought the resolutions sent down were worthy of being accepted nearly in their entirety; but should some amendments be thought necessary he believed the Executive would not object to any alterations that did not jeopardize the success of the scheme. We were about to deal with a far-seeing, honorable class of statesmen who once having passed their word we should be perfectly safe in their hands. Even if British Columbia would accept 'mean conditions' he did not think Canada would offer them. Our representatives at Ottawa would have a voice in the affairs of the Confederation and an influence to secure the colony measures which would make it great, prosperous and happy. The hon member alluded to the union of Great Britain and Ireland. The members who represented Ireland in the British Parliament actually held the balance of power there and by swaying between the Disraelis and Gladstones of different times, they might with little difficulty obtain everything their country needed as well as hold the bulk of patronage. If Canada should endeavor to wrong us—which he did not fear—our representatives could make common cause with other small provinces against her. British Columbia would be believed, be a pet sister of the confederacy. The policy of the government in this matter should be supported by everyone about the board, in order to place the question fairly before the people. The Executive Council had been actuated by the best and purest of motives: they brought the question down properly and fairly before this Council, and would accept every amendment, addition or alteration passed by this Council, provided it did not jeopardize the success of the scheme with the Canadian Government. After the Canadian Government had passed upon the terms, they would come back for ratification by the people. Could anything be fairer? He believed, with the member for District No 2, that the Canadian Government could adapt the tariff to benefit or protect every vested interest in this colony as well as in their own. The Dominion is more prosperous to-day without Reciprocity than it was with it. The abrogation of that treaty taught her self-reliance and she sought new channels of trade for her products. The hon gentleman eulogized Canada and its government, and said there was one point he wished still to notice—Responsible Government. It was said he had lost popularity through some remarks made by him against it upon a previous occasion; but his honest opinion as an individual was that the population of the colony was too small and too scattered for the application of the principle to this colony at present. He believed, however, in the ability of the Anglo-Saxon race for self-government. Further, he maintained that the system enunciated by the Governor would be the best for the colony. By that system the people would have control of the purse-strings. Such he believed to be the form best adapted to our wants in our present state, yet he believed a majority of the people of the colony were in favor of Responsible Government. So far as his constituents were concerned they did not send him there to advocate any particular scheme, but they had sufficient confidence in him to allow him to pursue his own course. Responsible Government, he contended, was not a condition of union, for the Organic Act gave the people the right to frame their own constitution in every particular save that which applied to the appointment of the Lieutenant-Governor, and if a majority of the British subjects in the colony wanted Responsible Government, no power on earth could keep it from them. The hon gentleman next briefly sketched the work of the Executive Council, remarking, jocosely, that the duties he performed there were his first Cabinet work. He defended the hon Attorney General and the Chief Commissioner against the charge of inconsistency on this question which was brought against them by the member for District No 2. It was well known, he said, that the hon member for that district had himself negotiated Confederation.

Mr. DeCosmos [rising]—Sir, Mr Clerk, take down these words.

Dr Carrall—You need'nt. I take it back, I take it back. [great laughter] But I understood the hon gentleman to say that he had received some years ago a telegram from a Cabinet Minister to say that Confederation was not just then obtainable. The doctor continued that the two official members to whom he had alluded were in favor of Confederation long before they had a pension secured them. [cries of 'no, no.'] The mature deliberation and the co-operation of the members of the Legislative Council were included in this great scheme. The hon gentleman next alluded to the hon senior member for Victoria city, every wrinkle in whose forehead was a mark of a well-spent life. He thought that what that hon gentleman had said about Annexation was inopportune and unhappy, and if he meant that annexation would ever be entertained by the Executive he had misrepresented the Council. Dr Carrall paid a warm tribute to the people of the United States, but said that he did not like their political institutions. The action taken by certain foreigners here in respect to annexation was unfortunate. They lived under the British flag and enjoyed all the rights and privileges they would be entitled to in their own country, and more, and they had acted foolishly towards the flag that sheltered them and abused the hospitality of the flag that protected them by signing an annexation petition. If any Britishers had signed it they were unworthy the name and would be better in the chaingang. The hon senior member for Victoria city had said patriotism was rubbish and nonsense, and that the dollar was supreme. (Dr Helmcken—I'll have to answer you.) By a sort of *in quoque* argument, I suppose; but you *did* say so. In behalf of this colony Dr Carrall would repudiate such a doctrine as that patriotism was no more. The people were as patriotic, noble and generous-hearted as in any other colony.

Dr Helmcken—I cannot allow the hon gentleman to make a speech about something I didn't say. I said this colony had no love for Canada and that it sought to advance its material interests only by joining her.

Dr Carrall—You *did* say it, doctor, and I maintain that the people of British Columbia are loyal and patriotic.

Mr DeCosmos would take this opportunity of denying that he had entered into negotiations with Canada for the transfer of this colony.

Dr Carrall—Well, well, I took it all back and I'll take it back again and again. [Laughter.] I understood you so.

Mr Dewdney said that he thought it incumbent upon him to state the course he intended to pursue. He regretted that lately he had not been enabled to consult his constituents upon the subject of Confederation; but he knew that a person who had been sent into the Kootenay district with a petition for Confederation was roughly handled and had to abandon the attempt to get signatures. But had he now an opportunity of consulting them he believed they would favor Confederation upon the terms proposed. He would, therefore, support the motion of the hon Attorney General and he did so the more cordially because the terms required to be finally ratified by the people. In general he should support the terms in committee, believing the sooner they were passed and placed in the hands of the Executive, the better it would be for the success of the negotiations. [Applause.]

Mr Alston rose to explain his position. The Imperial Government had expressed it as its decided and settled plan that the whole of the British North American Provinces shall be united. More than that, Downing street had undertaken to guide the introduction of this question into the council. He rejoiced that the measure had come down from the government. The resolutions before the council were simply the initial step, as they must come before a popular body for ratification. The hon senior member for Victoria city deserved praise for assuming for the public good a position wherein he laid himself open to misrepresentation and abuse; but the impress of the hon senior member's handiwork was seen in these resolutions. Although he did not approve of revolutions and blood and thunder arguments, he thought the people of Red River had been hardly dealt with—their soil might be sold, but their souls, never. [hear, hear] Whether Confederation came or not, he hoped to see a change in the Constitution of the colony so that every member of the Council, save the Executive, should be elected by the people. Responsible government he did not think the colony prepared for, but if the people could provide more efficient or better officers than the present staff, in God's name let them come. Vancouver Island was forced into union with British Columbia, and the abolition of free port was a great mistake. With regard to protection Mr Alston thought that all the farmer required was easy communication with his markets and good roads. He believed, however, the Canadian government would adjust a tariff to suit the colony. Canada would deal justly with us, at any rate our duty is to meet her frankly and trustingly until she acted otherwise. He was prepared to shake hands with the Canadians across the Rocky Mountains instead of shaking his fist at them. In conclusion Mr Alston announced his intention of supporting the resolutions and said his vote would be conscientious and consistent.

Dr Helmcken—Every word I have uttered in this council I abide by; but I will not be misrepresented. I never said patriotism was dead, and I never advocated Annexation—but the feeling of Annexation does exist and it is as well the Canadian Government should know it. The people are not in favor of Confederation. Take away the terms and they will oppose it. The Confederation party has never sent in any scheme that the people could support, and it was to the credit of the Government that it had send down acceptable terms. But hon gentlemen argued as though those terms were already obtained, and not one member of the council had said he would oppose Confederation if those terms were not granted.

Mr DeCosmos—I stated yesterday if certain terms were not granted I should oppose Confederation.

Dr Helmcken—I expect to see you an opponent of Confederation before long; probably we shall change sides. (laughter) but until these terms, or terms that will be satisfactory to the people, are arranged I shall not cease my opposition. I have opposed the Government. The question is lost—I am beaten by the Canadian and Imperial Governments and Granville's dispatch, but by no one else. I intend supporting these terms, but other terms must go in—fair terms—that Canada may have no excuse, so that if Confederation does come it will be acceptable to the people. In going into the Executive Council—I will not say that I have sent in my resignation—I did so at a great sacrifice. I heard an hon gentleman say the other day that he had been engaged in 'beating the bush while others caught the bird.' The gentleman had indeed beat the bush until he had frightened nearly all the 'birds' from the country. They had gone to people the adjoining country and ours was an unoccupied waste.

The Attorney General made a few remarks in explanation of his position and said the charge that had been made that the members of the Government had asserted the people of this colony were not fit for responsible government were not true. They had only said that the condition of the colony did not justify it at present. He the (Attorney General) said with Confederation under the terms proposed, the people could have responsible government, as the British North American Act of Union gave the local government power to change its own constitution, and he hoped all would unite in the endeavor to obtain the terms proposed in the resolutions.

Mr Drake, by permission, withdrew his amendment, and the resolution of the Attorney General to go into committee was carried unanimously.

The House went into Committee of the Whole and immediately rose, reported progress and asked leave to sit again.

Council adjourned till Monday at 1 p.m.