

1870.

QUEENSLAND.

PROPOSED SUBMARINE AND LAND TELEGRAPH
BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND THE AUSTRALIAN
COLONIES.

(FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE RESPECTING.)

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Excellency the Governor.

32, Charing Cross, London,
19th May, 1870.

SIR,

I have the honor to transmit herewith, copy of correspondence which has passed between Captain Sherard Osborn, C.B., Mr. Earle, the Managing Director of the British and Australian Telegraph Company, and myself. Also, copy of telegram despatched by me to you on the 14th instant, in order to catch the Australian steamer from Galle on the 18th instant.

You will gather from this correspondence, that I have felt it to be my duty to direct the attention of the British and Australian Telegraph Company to the possibility of great delay being caused by the South Australian Government insisting on the adoption of the overland line to Spencer's Gulf.

If a good understanding could be established between the Governments of Queensland and South Australia, it may probably be found most advantageous for all concerned, that a land line should be constructed between Port Darwin to some point at the mouth of the Roper, and that then, by some combination among the colonies interested, the intervening link should be supplied by laying a light cable between the Roper and Normanton.

I have, &c.,

J. DOUGLAS.

The Honorable The Colonial Secretary, Brisbane.

No. 1.

Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company (Limited and Reduced),
Offices, 38, Old Broad Street,

London, 5th May, 1870.

DEAR MR. DOUGLAS,

With reference to our conversation of yesterday, it appears to me that if Queensland and New South Wales are determined not to be dependent on the Colony of South Australia for their telegraphic communications with Europe, that their best mode of proceeding would be to connect the terminal station, Port Darwin, with Burketown, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, by a cable such as I have indicated on the accompanying chart, by a dotted red line: that cable would be only 930 miles long, instead of the 1,320 miles necessary for a direct cable from Koepang to Burketown. The cost of 930 miles of cable of the best description, would be £300 per mile—£279,000, and it could be laid at the same time as the Australian cable, in 1871, if we received the order by Christmas next. I have no doubt that if the two Governments guaranteed a five per cent. dividend on this capital, that we could raise the funds in this country in combination with the British Australian Telegraph Company; or, if they declined it, form a separate company for the purpose. There is another

way of which the colonists can best judge of its merits, namely:—Supposing the Australian Telegraph Company abandon their present proposed land line, from Port Darwin to Burketown, owing to the Government of South Australia undertaking to erect a land line from Adelaide to Port Darwin, that the Queensland Government should in like manner, at its own cost, construct and maintain the line originally proposed. This, no doubt, would be the least expensive to the colony; but you know best what the cost of maintaining such a land-line would be, and I can only say that every day's experience is proving the vast superiority of submarine lines over land lines, the greater outlay in construction being within ten years recouped by the saving in maintenance.

I am, &c.,

(Signed)

SHERARD OSBORN.

Managing Director.

No. 2.

32, Charing Cross,
10th May, 1870.

DEAR CAPTAIN OSBORN,

I have to thank you for your letter of the 5th instant, with its accompanying chart. I believe, with you, that the provinces of Eastern Australia would prefer that the cable should be connected at the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria rather than at Port Darwin.

In the event certainly of the threatened postponement of the whole enterprise by the abandonment of the overland line from Port Darwin to Burketown, and the adoption of the proposed route across the continent to the head of Spencer's Gulf, I anticipate that propositions will be made for the purpose of laying a cable direct from Keopang to Normanton in Queensland.

There is much to recommend such an alternative, and I shall take care to inform the Government of Queensland of the contingencies which you seem to anticipate.

I trust, however, that the original scheme will be carried out in its integrity. It provides what would be a serviceable line at a moderate cost, and these are essential considerations both to the British and Australian Telegraph Company and to the Australian Public.

I am, &c.,

(Signed)

JOHN DOUGLAS.

Captain Sherard Osborn, C.B., R.N.

No. 3.

Queensland Government Offices,
32, Charing Cross, London, 11th May, 1870.

MY LORD,

Mr. Earle, the Managing Director of the British and Australian Telegraph Company, did me the honor of calling on me a few days ago, and I have since then seen Sir James Anderson, who is one of your Directors.

I understand from both these gentlemen that there is a probability of a departure from the original scheme of the Company, with a view to abandon the proposed land line from Port Darwin to Burketown in Queensland, and to substitute in its place a line across the Continent of Australia, from Port Darwin to the head of Spencer's Gulf, to be constructed by the Government of South Australia, through South Australian territory.

In the interests of Australian Colonisation, there can be no doubt that such a line, stretching from north to south, across the Continent, would be of the greatest importance, and of the highest utility; but I should wish to be permitted to point out to you that it is by no means essential to the interests of your Company, and that if it is determined to accept the propositions made by the Government of South Australia, such determination will be tantamount to an indefinite postponement of the great work of uniting Great Britain with the centres of population in Australia.

I take leave to assert that no guarantee can be given by the Government of South Australia that such a continental land line can be completed within such a specified time as would be considered reasonable by the Company or by the Australian public. The cost, also, of construction will be more than usually heavy, and the maintenance must be more than ordinarily expensive; both of which will, I presume, entail an increase of charges for messages, and necessarily a diminution in the number of them. On the other hand, it is very certain that the land section from Port Darwin to Burketown can be constructed within a given time through a country which is already partially occupied—which is accessible from the seaboard, and which, therefore, presents facilities for the transport of material and of supplies for the working parties. Such facilities do not exist in the alternative continental route across 2,000 miles of country which, though in immediate contiguity with the settlements of South Australia, still remains uninhabited by Europeans, and unreclaimed from the wilderness.

Should, however, the Company deem it for their interest to substitute any other line for that originally proposed—though I believe that such deviation would be undesirable—I would beg to suggest that a submarine cable, laid direct from Koepang to Normanton, on the Gulf of Carpentaria, would be more profitable to the Company, and more acceptable to the Australian public.

It would, also, be much more convenient for the Government of Queensland, and would render it unnecessary for that Government to undertake the construction of any line beyond that which they now have in hand.

Any proposition, therefore, which the Company may feel inclined to make to the Government of Queensland, with a view to substitute a cable to Normanton for a land line to Burketown, will, I am sure, receive their most favorable consideration, and I shall be happy to advance negotiations as far as I can.

I am, &c.,

(Signed)

JOHN DOUGLAS.

Viscount Monck,

Chairman of the British and Australian Telegraph Company.

No. 4.

British Australian Telegraph Company (Limited),

66, Old Broad street, London, E.C.

12th May, 1870.

DEAR SIR,

I am in receipt of your letter of the 11th instant, addressed to Lord Monck, who is at this moment absent from London.

The letter shall be read at the next meeting of the Board, and a copy, in the meantime, will be forwarded to the chairman.

Without in the least doubting the accuracy of the general view you adopt as to the most eligible route for telegraphic communication, between the Australian Colonies and the rest of the world, I may take it upon myself to say, that the interest of this Company, we think, will be best considered by an arrangement which leaves us free from the construction, working, and maintenance of land lines on the Australian Continent, and that we shall accept the most desirable offer we may receive (before the 7th August next), relieving us from that part of our undertaking.

I do not think that the Board of this Company will be inclined to originate proposals to any of the Colonial Governments. We cannot delay the carrying out of the undertaking to commence negotiations. At the same time, should your Government think it to their interest to guarantee a sufficient subsidy to make it worth our while to extend our cable to a point on the Queensland coast, or even offer such a guarantee as would relieve us from the expense of constructing and maintaining the Burketown land line, we shall be quite ready to receive their proposals, and shall give them the most attentive and careful consideration.

I need not say that any proposal must be expressed in the most formal and binding terms, and must be in our hands on the arrival of the mail due 7th August next.

I am, &c.,

(Signed)

C. W. EARLE,

Managing Director.

J. Douglas, Esquire, Agent-General for Queensland.

By Electric Telegraph, Brisbane to Sydney, and Galle to London.

12th July, 1870.

Addressed to J. Douglas, Agent Queensland, 32, Charing Cross, London.

In the event of company not accepting offer sent last month, we will guarantee to them, or any other good company, at same rate and on same terms for cable from Koepang to Norman, irrespective of any arrangement company may have made with South Australia as to Port Darwin line. You are fully authorised to secure cable without delay. We will not, under any circumstances, connect with South Australian land line to Darwin.

A. H. PALMER,

Colonial Secretary.