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**T**HE First Session of the Ninth Parliament of New Zealand was this day opened by the Governor, when His Excellency was pleased to make the following

S P E E C H.

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

It affords me much pleasure to meet you again in Parliament assembled.

I have recourse to your assistance as early as the arrangements consequent on the retirement of the late Administration have permitted.

My Advisers are of opinion that it is undesirable that questions of abstract policy should at present be dealt with further than circumstances render imperatively necessary, and that concentrated attention should be given to many urgent matters relating to the material, economic, and industrial interests of the colony. As far as time will allow, it is proposed to deal with such matters during this session.

Great importance is to be attached to improving the industrial resources of the colony: prominent amongst which may be mentioned the mining interest, the promotion of settlement, and the advancement of local production and manufactures. It is of the first consequence that the country should possess satisfactory and sufficient industries. The subject requires very careful and comprehensive treatment, and little in such a direction can be effected through the Customs tariff, which is already very high.

The progress of public works also demands resolute attention. It will be necessary to consider carefully the position of those now in progress, with a view to determining how they shall be proceeded with. It cannot prove economical to construct works in a manner so slow and fragmentary as to postpone indefinitely any return from the money expended. On the other hand the colony must be careful to restrain the exercise of its borrowing powers within reasonable limits.

My Ministers consider that a great deal of the pressure which is brought to bear on a Government to construct works in unprofitable fragments arises through

the fear that if works are delayed parliamentary authority for them may be withdrawn, and are therefore of opinion that it would be expedient to determine that the public faith is pledged, unless under very exceptional circumstances, to the works which Parliament once sanctions. If this assurance be well understood, the various districts concerned will be contented to see works carried on in a manner compatible with early returns from the expenditure.

My Ministers consider that great care should be exercised with regard to extending existing engagements. Some works already commenced require to be carried on vigorously—such, for example, as the Otago Central Railway. The small length of line required to connect Napier with Palmerston North should also receive early attention.

The authority to continue the Nelson line to Roundell should be extended to connecting Nelson with the line between the east and west coasts of the Middle Island. The trunk system of the Island would then be nearly completed.

The line to connect the east and west coasts of the Middle Island, to which I have just referred, is of great importance. My Advisers will propose to you to endeavour, in the first instance, to procure its construction by aiding private enterprise. There is every reason for believing that the west coast of the Middle Island possesses mineral resources of enormous value; indeed, as regards coal and gold, the existence of such resources under highly remunerative conditions has been proved. The proposed railway will greatly benefit the district; but, for the proper development of the capabilities of the West Coast, other measures will be required whilst the railway works are in progress. I commend the whole subject to your earnest consideration.

The completion of through railway communication between Auckland and Wellington is a colonial work of vast importance, which must be hastened to a conclusion with the utmost possible expedition. It will be proposed to you to appoint a Select Committee to report which route it would be most expedient to adopt. Authority will be asked to enable the State to acquire extensive blocks of land along the line of this railway.

My Advisers are of opinion that lands adjacent to this and other railways should be set apart for the settlement of a large number of families, upon conditions calculated to ensure their prosperity, the area for each family being limited.

You will recognize that it is of great moment the lands in the North Island that are now held by Natives should be put to productive uses as rapidly as possible, either by the Natives themselves or by Europeans. It is therefore very desirable that the best means of enabling the Natives to dispose of their lands, when they desire to do so, should be adopted. But it will be useless to provide machinery for the sale or leasing of Native lands unless the Natives themselves are favourably inclined to make use of it. My Ministers, therefore, whilst considering that the present system has most objectionable features, propose to postpone final legislation on the subject until next session. A temporary Act may possibly be necessary; but the object to be kept in view is to come to an understanding with the Natives during the recess as to the plan which, while not inconsistent with the interests of the colony, will be most likely to lead to results satisfactory to the Maori race.

Plans will be submitted to you, this session if possible, for strengthening and improving the system of local government, by giving to local bodies larger duties and an assured income.

#### GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

Estimates of revenue and expenditure will be laid before you with the least possible delay.

My Advisers are of opinion that the present expenditure for departmental and other purposes may be considerably contracted. They consider it necessary to establish an equilibrium between expenditure and receipts.

They greatly object to the present property-tax, and will propose its repeal at the earliest moment practicable. They are favourable to an equal and moderate land-tax, deducting from the value of the land, improvements and a reasonable amount of exemption. The results of such a tax should as far as possible be localized, in accordance with the proposal to strengthen local government.

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

My Ministers consider that the present management of the colonial railways is open to much amendment. A measure will be submitted to you to provide for Boards of Management in the Middle Island, and in Auckland, subject to Parliament retaining control over the tariff of charges.

Your attention will be called to the expediency of promoting trade and commercial relations with the South Sea Islands.

Amongst the measures to be brought before you will be Bills to Improve the Conditions under which Married Women may hold Property; and to Incorporate and Place under adequate Management the Life Insurance Department, with provisions for establishing Local Boards elected by the Policy-holders.

I commend to your most earnest attention the large interests confided to you, and I earnestly hope that, with the blessing of God, great advantages to the colony may result from the discharge of your arduous duties.

