ON THE SESSION OF THE VOUKS-RAAB OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN TERRITORY

AUGUST 8, 1886
SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC.

REPORT

BY

HER MAJESTY’S AGENT AT PRETORIA,

ON THE

SESSION OF THE VOLKSRAAD OF THE

SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC IN

1888.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty,

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SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC.

REPORT BY THE BRITISH AGENT AT PRETORIA ON THE SESSION OF THE VOLKSRaad FOR 1888.

Mr. Williams to Sir Hercules Robinson,
British Agency, Pretoria,
South African Republic,

Sir,
August 8, 1888.

I have the honour to inform your Excellency that the ordinary annual session of the Volksraad of the South African Republic was opened on the 7th of May for the transaction of business.

The principal matters referred to in the opening speech of the President were:

(a.) The Conference held at Bloemfontein in September 1887.
(b.) The correspondence with the High Commissioner as to the sending of deputies to the Conference recently held in Cape Town.
(c.) The proposal to unite with the New Republic.
(d.) "The request of the King of Matabeleland, Lo Bengula, and a full assembly of his councillors to have a representative of this Republic in Matabeleland," Mr. P. J. Grobler having been appointed as such.
(e.) Re-election of State Secretary.

The first question of importance submitted to the Raad was that of the importation of coolies.

By resolution of Volksraad of July 1887, Government was empowered to draw up a law to stop the importation of coolies and Chinese. The Executive reported that they could not submit such a draft law to the Raad, it being, in the opinion of the State Attorney, in conflict with the Convention of London.

In the result a resolution has been adopted that "as the importation of coolies acted prejudicially to the best interests of the State, correspondence should be opened with Her Majesty's Government in order to have the provisions of the Convention in this respect modified."

The draft of an amended gold law was submitted and passed as printed.

The sum of 3,000£ has been voted for the purpose of taking part in the Paris Exhibition of 1889, and the Government has been authorised to appoint a commissioner to represent the State.

On the 12th of May Mr. J. F. Celliers was sworn in as member for Barberton; the first representative elected on behalf of the gold fields.
Sanction has been given to the provisional operation of a Spoor Convention with British Bechuanaland, for the prevention of theft on the border and for the recovery of stolen cattle.

A reply was drafted on the 12th of May to the communication of the German Government with respect to the death of the Emperor William and the accession of the Emperor Frederick.

In view of the high price of necessaries and house rent, members' allowances have been increased from 17. 10s. to 2l. per diem.

An agreement has been sanctioned by which the South African Republic takes over the New Republic with all the privileges they have hitherto enjoyed.

By this agreement the burghers of the New Republic obtain the franchise in the South African Republic on the same conditions as prevail in the New Republic, being thus placed on a very advantageous position compared with other new comers into the country, the five year and 15 year term not being held to apply in their case.

The President stated with reference to the New Republic, that the Convention between the South African Republic and the New Republic on the one hand, and the British Government on the other, had been sent to the High Commissioner, to be forwarded to Her Majesty for signature.

The suggestions of the Cape Colony Government with regard to the addition of Article II. of Act No. 9 of 1887 of another article to include the extradition of fugitives who have contravened the Insolvent Ordinance, and to extend Article No. XIV. of 1886 for a period of one year until February of next year, until the new treaty entered into should come into force, have been approved of.

A discussion regarding the islands situate on the Vaal River has resulted in the Government being authorised to sell such of the islands as belong to the South African Republic.

A concession granting to Mr. Edward Amandus Lippert a monopoly, for the period of three years, of the sole manufacture of Portland and hydraulic cements, has been passed by 24 votes to eight.

The granting of this concession has roused much adverse criticism in the newspapers and elsewhere.

An Act has been passed for the prevention of cruelty to animals, the desire being to deal as far as possible with the cruelty inflicted on trek oxen.

An Act has been passed which provides for the flogging of white men.

This law has provoked much comment from the press and the public, owing to the comparatively trifling offences which entail the penalty.

A law has been passed to make certain alterations in the constitution of the High Court.

By this law the appointment of a third puisne judge has been sanctioned, circuit courts have been created, and other matters of detail arranged.
Authorisation has been given to Government to suspend the licences of careless surveyors. As the majority of the surveyors are from the Cape Colony and Natal, I insert this provision.

An Act has been passed for the proper observance and to prevent desecration of the Sunday, which, for the information of strangers entering the country, I will summarise.

Briefly speaking, penalties have been provided for:
(a.) Selling or offering for sale on that day goods, cattle, or other live stock.
(b.) For opening a shop or other place for the purpose of trading.
(c.) For working in the veld or garden.
(d.) For firing off a gun.
(e.) For working steam or other machinery.
(f.) For hunting or coursing:
(g.) For selling by the market-master or other person on the market.
(h.) For keeping open a public place for billiard playing or gambling.
(i.) For assembling in a public place for the purpose of gambling, dog fighting, or cock fighting.

Exception to these penalties is made in favour:
(a.) Of apothecaries and druggists selling medicines.
(b.) Of hotel or lodging-house keepers affording necessaries to travellers.
(c.) Of those who buy before 9 o'clock in the morning meat or bread from butchers, bakers, or refreshment vendors.
(d.) Of those who buy before 9 o'clock in the morning and after 4 o'clock in the afternoon milk from milk vendors.

On the 20th of May a discussion took place on the franchise, but the suggestions for a revision of the qualification were thrown out by a majority of 25.

The Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour has been offered to the President by the French Republic, and accepted by his Honour, with the consent of the Volksraad.

A discussion has taken place on a petition that the concession granted to the Netherlands Company, for the construction of a railway from Delagoa Bay, should be withdrawn, it being detrimental to the best interests of the country.

The prayer of the petitioners was refused.

It has been announced, in reply to a petition, that the Government did not at present intend to construct any other railway than the Delagoa Bay line.

Mr. J. N. de Villiers, a member of the Volksraad, has been appointed representative of the South African Republic at the exhibition to be held in Paris in 1889.

A discussion has taken place as to the construction of bridges, a very important question in the Republic.

A discussion has taken place as to the import duties, with the result that a Commission has been appointed to consider them.
It has been resolved to authorise Government to establish tolls at Bronkhorst Spruit and other places, to impose a waggon licence on transport riders coming from Natal (the cost of the licence suggested being 17. or 17. 10s.).

A discussion has taken place as to the rights of coolies within the Republic to trade without restriction, with the result that the report of the Memorial Commission that "the Raad should request Government to inquire into the matter and see that "the law be strictly enforced" was approved of.

In the course of the discussion the Chairman of the Raad ruled that "coolies are coloured people (kleurlingen), not natives (inboorlingen)." (Friday, 8th June 1888).

Public opinion in this matter is somewhat divided, the storekeepers being opposed to the coolie trade, the general public in favour of it; since the establishment of the coolies prices for articles retailed in shops having undergone considerable diminution.

An important discussion took place on the 9th of June, which, as it may be held to affect Article XIX. of the Convention of London, I will give to your Excellency somewhat in extenso.

Petitions were presented to the Volksraad to the effect that the Raad should revise Law No. II. of 1887, re locations of natives on farms. Memorialists desired that the law should be carried into effect, and that natives should be prohibited from hiring or buying fixed property.

In reply the Memorial Committee advised that the law provided amply for the condition of things, and recommended that the law be enforced.

I here quote the substance of the law referred to:

Article I.

The Government have the right of assigning to natives or other coloured people locations for living upon.

Article II.

Outside these locations five householders is the highest number that can live together as tenants or hired servants under white people.

The Commissioner of Native Affairs has power to grant permission for an increase of this number, with the sanction of the Government.

Article III.

Penalties provided for breach of Article II. by white men who employ natives, and provision made for the removal from off the land of natives, at the will of Government, to the locations provided by Government for them.
Penalties provided for natives who, against the will of a white man, settle on his farm.

And provision made for removing such natives on to the locations provided by Government for them.

Article V.

Law to take effect three months after publication in the Staats Courant.

The reason adduced by the advocates of the law is that the farmers cannot obtain hands to work for them, and that by thus scattering the natives every farmer will be able to get sufficient labour.

It was pointed out by one member that in the case of mission stations and large companies it would be dangerous to enforce the law.

In the result it was decided that the recommendation of the Memorial Commission be approved of, and that the law be carried into effect.

I have already informed your Excellency that I have received a communication from the Reverend Owen Watkins, Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions, on the question, pointing out that the action of the law, if carried out, will be to break up the mission stations established by the various societies, and to locate such mission stations compulsorily on ground laid down by Government and under Government control, while the property acquired by missionary bodies will be unduly depreciated in value.

I do not propose to write at length on the matter in the present state of the case.

A discussion has taken place on the desirability of imposing an increased tax on all wood brought into the country for fuel. The proposition was defeated by the casting vote of the chairman.

An important discussion has taken place as to the following:—

"The Executive having considered petitions in favour of constructing railways and tramways, decides to bring the matter before the honourable Volksraad, with a recommendation that a committee be appointed to investigate and report on the petition to the Raad."

The railways more especially referred to here are a suggested line between Pretoria and Johannesburg, and a suggested tramway between the coal fields and the gold fields of Witwatersrand.

The President stated in discussion, that "if a tramway was not soon constructed for the transport of coal, the gold fields would be 'done for,' and with the gold fields the country; coal was now at 17s. per bag."

The Vice-President said, that "the members expected much milk, but they allowed the cow to starve. The construction of a railway would prove a boon to the farmers."
That of the Puisne Judges to 1,200l. per annum, with full travelling expenses to both Chief Justice and Puisne Judges.

Almost all officials throughout the country have been granted augmented incomes.

A motion, that "it is desirable at an early date to revise the 'Grondwet,' in order to place the constitution on a more "sound basis, and to meet the present requirements of the "country," has been carried.

A concession has been granted to Mr. Edward Amandus Lippert for the exclusive right for 16 years of making gunpowder within the Republic.

Also the exclusive right, for the same period, to deal in gunpowder, Government rights being reserved.

Also the exclusive right, for the same period, of making dynamite.

Also the exclusive right of dealing in dynamite, Government rights being reserved.

The prices have been fixed for three years, after which they are subject to revision,—

Gunpowder at 1s. 6d. per pound.
Dynamite at 7l. 10s. per case.
Gelatine at 4s. 6d. per pound.

An election has taken place for the office of State Secretary, resulting in Dr. Leyds having been elected by a majority of six votes over Mr. Bok, the late holder of the office.

The Convention proposed by Her Majesty's Government to supplement the Convention of London, and having reference to the union between the South African Republic and the New Republic, has been ratified (27th of June 1888).

An amended treaty has been sanctioned by the Volksraad to the treaty with Belgium of the 3rd of February 1876.

Alterations have been effected in Article IV. as to the respective rights of burghers of the two nations with regard to military service.

The second sentence of Article XI. has been altered as follows:

The South African Republic also retains the right to grant to one or more of the adjoining States or Colonies certain exceptional allowances or privileges, which Belgium cannot demand on account of its right to the treaty applicable to every foreign country in general, or to the most favoured nation country.

That the present treaty have the same duration as the treaty of the 3rd of February 1876, and that it come into operation one month after exchange of ratifications, was carried by acclamation.

In further discussion on the estimates, a sum of 500l. per annum has been voted for the travelling expenses of the Minister of Mines and his secretary, showing the very high rate of travelling allowance necessary in the Republic.
On Monday, the 2nd of July, the Treaty of Union between the South African Republic and the New Republic was approved of by the Raad.

On Thursday, the 5th of July, a further discussion took place on the coolie question, resulting in a resolution being passed to carry the Coolie Location Law into effect, the President stating that the Government was still in communication with Her Majesty's Government on the matter.

It was decided to make such alterations in the provisions with regard to the appointment of State Secretary as will meet the case of Dr. Leyds, recently elected, and Dr. Leyds will enter upon that office in May 1889.

On the 10th of July a voluminous report was handed in to the Raad by the committee which had been appointed to consider the Free State Deputation. Briefly the committee recommended:—

(a.) That negotiations for a political union be continued.
(b.) That the principle of federal union be affirmed.
(c.) That a treaty of commerce and friendship be entered into, wherein free importation shall be permitted to the Free State, provided that no Colonial railway be extended towards the Transvaal border this side of Bloemfontein.
(d.) Finally the Committee recommend that free importation be granted to products from the Cape Colony and Natal, subject to the condition that those Colonies shall agree to wait with the extension of their own lines of railway until the railways of the State have been completed.

The report was passed and agreed to.

An amended Gold Law has been passed, reducing the licence fees and otherwise giving relief to the digging community.

The petition largely signed in favour of restoring representation in the Raad to the large towns has been set aside almost without discussion.

A correspondence between your Excellency and the State President on the question of the Delagoa Bay Railway has been laid before the Raad, resulting in the undertaking of Her Majesty's Government that it has no intention to buy or acquire the Portuguese Delagoa Bay Railway or the controlling power of that railway, or in McMurdo's Company, if the Government of the South African Republic will state that they have no intention to impose duties on imports by Colonial routes other than those imposed on imports by the Delagoa Bay route, to which the President's reply was, "As he had never had any intention to make difference in import duties on goods arriving by Colonial routes and those arriving by Delagoa Bay route, naturally he was quite prepared to give the required declaration."

Your Excellency's telegram of the 20th of June with reference to the cancellation of Article 39 of the Dutch Netherlands Railway concession was quoted.

An Act has been passed to enforce the use of the Dutch language on all markets and in all public offices by all officials.
This action of the Volksraad has given rise to much criticism.

On the 17th of July and on subsequent days a discussion took place on the report of the Committee on Railways and Tramways, to which I have previously referred.

The Committee advised that the proposed railway between Johannesburg and Pretoria should be disallowed, but that a concession should be granted to the Netherlands South African Railway for the construction of a tramway from Boksburg to Johannesburg.

In the result the recommendations of the Committee were passed in detail.

The Committee appointed to report on the relative merits of two rival applications for a concession for the establishment, within the Republic, of a bank and mint, reported on the one under Dutch auspices as most favourable.

On a division, however, it was decided by a majority of 17 to 11, that the matter of the bank be left over for one year.

On the following morning the Raad practically rescinded their resolution of the previous day, and, on the urgent solicitation of the President, passed a resolution by 28 votes to 9, conferring full powers on “the whole of the Executive Council” to deal with the question, and erect a bank and mint.

A suggestion has been made that immediate steps be taken next session to pass a resolution imposing a censorship of the press.

With this and the usual complimentary speeches the session of the Raad was concluded.

I trust that I may have succeeded in conveying to your Excellency, for the information of Her Majesty’s Government, a satisfactory epitome of the proceedings of the session of 1888 as a whole.

I have, &c.,

(Signed) RALPH CH. WILLIAMS,
Her Majesty’s Agent.

His Excellency the Right Hon.
Sir Hercules Robinson, G.C.M.G.,
&c. &c. &c.