

The Hon. the ATTORNEY-GENERAL said:—Sir, I rise to propose the adoption of the Resolution as sent down to the House, having as its object the Confederation of this Colony with the Dominion of Canada. I desire to consult the wish of the Council as to the particular mode in which the terms should be discussed, whether as a whole or in detail, paragraph by paragraph. But before doing so I think it right, Sir, to make a few brief remarks on the Resolution as a whole. The conditions have been prepared with great care, and after the exercise of deep thought and mature deliberation on the part of His Excellency the Governor and the Executive Council. The subject is one of so large a nature, and of such paramount importance, so many interests both here and in Canada are at stake, and the issues involved are so extensive, that I sincerely hope that all Hon. Members will bring to its discussion an earnest desire to combine their individual efforts to work out a successful result, and to throw aside, for such an occasion, all former prejudices and distrust; and as we have unanimously affirmed the principle, the House is committed to Confederation in the abstract ["No, no," from Hons. Helmcken, Wood and Drake]. Well, I think so, and the House will think so too. It has so voted. However that may be, I hope that we can all now act harmoniously together, and see whether we cannot now turn out such a scheme as will work well in practice; be just and equitable to Canada, who will certainly be just and equitable to us, and yet be so favourable to this Colony as to insure the terms ratification when submitted to the popular vote. All Hon. Members, whatever their opinions, desire the same thing, namely, to get the best terms practicable for the country; and the proposition now sent down, which is based upon the "British North America Act, 1867," contains, I submit, the best terms that can be devised, and will give the Local Government as large an annual balance of cash for local purposes as we can venture to ask. There is one danger against which I think it my duty to warn Hon. Members, and I do particularly caution those who favour the idea of Confederation against attempting to weigh the conditions by additional suggestions and recommendations so as to overload them, and against suggesting alterations in the terms which could not be granted by Canada. I believe we are all equally anxious to gain good terms, and we should be careful not to take away from the interest of the proposition before us by suggesting any other conditions that are not of material importance. I have observed a report in a newspaper of the previous proceedings of the Council, if I may be allowed to notice it without producing the paper, in which an Hon. Member is stated to have said, that any amendments of the Resolution would be accepted. I think it right to say, on behalf of the Government, that, while the Government cannot consent to imperil the unity of their scheme by amendments, they will still be happy to receive, and fully consider, all suggestions of a practical and reasonable character; and I invite Hon. Members to bring forward such suggestions, particularly such as will be calculated to remove any of the disadvantages of the scheme, and so to improve its working and insure its more general acceptance. As the majority of the Council seem to be in favour of dividing the Resolution into parts, and discussing it paragraph by paragraph, I will follow the suggestion. I therefore, now propose the adoption of the first paragraph:—

"1. Canada shall be liable for the Debts and Liabilities of British Columbia at the time of Union."

These debts and liabilities, I would explain, include all the actual debts of the Colony now matured and due, as well as the liabilities for debts to mature at a future day. I will quote from the Returns sent down this day by the Governor, which give the full details of these liabilities, showing that our funded debt, on the 10th of March instant, consisted of the British Columbia and Vancouver Island Loans secured by Act, amounting in all to \$1,194,000, against which \$346,820 has been paid and invested as a Sinking Fund in reduction of Loans, leaving a balance of \$817,180 still to be invested, and floating debt of all kinds of \$319,000, including over \$40,000 Savings Bank deposits. This floating debt it is in contemplation to consolidate by a Statutory Loan, at a lower rate of interest, and to procure the money from Canada, which, as Hon. Members are aware, is now rich, or elsewhere. For this purpose the Governor proposes to submit an Ordinance for the approval of this House, conferring the necessary powers. Owing to the mode in which the Sinking Fund is invested, there is reason to believe that it will be paid off at least a year before the time stated. Regarded as a whole, our public debt is by no means extravagant, as compared with that of other countries; but in our isolated position as a young self-dependent Colony it is felt as a very heavy burden; of