



What's the story?

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1870

VOGEL, Sir Julius, K.C.M.G.

(1835–99).

Prime Minister.

Julius Vogel was born in London on 24 February 1835, the son of Albert Leopold Vogel and Phoebe, *née* Isaac. He received his early education at home until the age of 13. After the death of his parents he worked in the office of his grandfather, a merchant with interests in the West Indies and South America. Just prior to emigrating to Australia where the Victorian gold discoveries had attracted his interest, Vogel entered on a course of studies in chemistry and metallurgy at the Royal School of Mines in Jermyn Street, London.

Vogel arrived in Melbourne in late 1852 and opened a business, but after losses through speculation he went to the goldfields where he started a drug store in the new town of Maryborough. An interest in journalism led to his becoming editor of the *Inglewood Advertiser* and the *Talbot Leader*. With journalism came an increasing interest in politics. Severe defeat in his candidature for the Avoca seat, combined with news of the Otago gold rush of 1861, drew his attention towards New Zealand. He arrived in the colony in the spring of 1861 and, shortly after, his interest in journalism led to the establishment with a partner, W. H. Cutten, of the *Otago Daily Times* which appeared on 15 November 1861. With Farjeon as manager, the paper was a brilliant success, but Vogel's continual advocacy of the separation of the North and South Islands, to relieve the latter of the burden of debt caused by the Maori Wars, led to his dismissal in 1868. In retaliation Vogel established *The Sun* as opposition, but shortly after discarded it to concentrate on national politics. His interest in journalism continued, however, for in 1870 he bought the Auckland newspaper *Southern Cross*.

Throughout the sixties Vogel's interest in journalism had been matched by his activity in local and national politics. After two vain attempts in early 1863 to enter the House of Representatives as a member for a Dunedin constituency, he had to be content with representing Waikouaiti in the Otago Provincial Council. Here he had greater opportunity to advocate publicly his views on separation, as well as to put forward his imaginative and often far-sighted ideas on subjects usually outside the scope of provincial politics. The period from 1863 to 1867 was a time of increasing political change and activity in Vogel's life. In September 1863 he was elected unopposed to Parliament for Dunedin Suburbs. Though his schemes were distrusted in the House of Representatives, he managed in 1866 to carry a resolution to reunite Otago and Southland. In the same year he was defeated in the contest for the Waikouaiti seat in the General Assembly. He resigned his seat in the Provincial Council and shortly afterwards contested and won the Taieri seat against his bitter opponent, A. J. Burns. Meanwhile he was again sent back to the House of Representatives for the goldfields. In February 1867 he further changed his seat to represent

Dunedin in the Provincial Assembly, where he now became head of the Government. This position he held until he left Otago. A dispute between Macandrew the Superintendent of Otago, and the General Government over the administration of the goldfields gave Vogel his opportunity to continue his demand for provincial autonomy. Despite his vehemence he failed.

Meanwhile, in Parliament the absence of William Fox from politics gave Vogel the opportunity to become the leading light of the Opposition in its attacks on the native policy of Stafford. He also defended provincial rights against Stafford's centralism – a fact later used against himself when he, Vogel, began the fight to abolish the provinces. After the defeat of Stafford in June 1869 Vogel was appointed Colonial Treasurer, Postmaster-General, and Commissioner of Customs in Fox's Ministry. His concern with provincial matters now gradually lessened as he turned completely to national politics.

Fox was the titular head of the Ministry but Vogel soon became the real exponent of Government policy. He was now in a position to put into practice the large and imaginative schemes which provincial politics could not encompass, and which the national politicians had distrusted in earlier years. But by the end of the sixties the colony, in a state of economic stagnation, was ready to accept Vogel's dramatic Financial Statement of 28 June 1870 in which he proposed that development would be financed by £10 million, to be borrowed on overseas markets. The essence of the scheme he outlined in one sentence: "We recognize that the great wants of the Colony are – public works, in the shape of roads and railways; and immigration ... the two are, or ought to be, inseparably united....". Provision for the repayment of the 5 1/2 per cent interest charges was to be made from receipts above working expenses, from railway revenue, and from stamp duty. As security, and to ensure that the provinces would be able to meet repayments, Vogel intended that the land should bear a considerable portion of the financial burden.

Vogel stated three principles of Government policy regarding administration of public works and immigration. Both islands would share in the scheme; there would be no changes in political institutions; and although the need for colonisation was general, the Ministry realised that conditions throughout the colony varied widely. The scheme was intelligent and appropriate in its conception. Had its administration been careful and the safeguards heeded, it may have benefited the colony greatly. Vogel, however, was not the man to insist on maintaining the controls. His main object was to borrow the capital, regardless of the concessions he had to make to provincialism and local greed. Featherston and Bell were sent to England during the year to raise the money, but while they obtained a guarantee for £1 million, Vogel had authorised the spending of £4 million on the first stage of the policy. He himself left on a loan-raising visit to England and the United States at the end of 1870 and, after borrowing £1,200,000, granted railway and immigration contracts to John Brogden and Sons.

Vogel returned to the colony in 1871 and took his seat as member for Auckland City East constituency where his popularity was considerably higher than in Otago. Virtual leader of the Government and spokesman for its policy measures, Vogel was nevertheless not yet at the peak of his power. In 1872 sufficient caution still remained in the House for the prudent Stafford to defeat the Government in September and establish his own Ministry. Unfortunately for the cautious advocates, Stafford lasted only a month. Vogel returned to power with the support of the provincialist-minded politicians, and for the next three years his power was supreme. Although serving under two titular heads, he soon assumed the forms of power in addition to the substance. In April 1873 he became Prime Minister.

In the next two years, however, it became evident that the policy was running out of the control both of Vogel and of his Government, as insatiable provincialist members demanded capital in return for their votes. The principles which Vogel had enunciated were disregarded in the scramble and, gradually, he came to the conclusion that either the provinces or his scheme must be sacrificed. The pretext for action was the rejection of his New Zealand Forests Bill by the provincialists who objected to it as an encroachment by the Central Government on their land. But

Vogel did not push through the unpopular Abolition Bill himself. He left in 1874 to raise another loan while H. A. Atkinson took over and passed the Act in 1875. In the following February Vogel returned to New Zealand as a K.C.M.G., but his long absence, charges of extravagance, the dislike of the provincialists, and the drop in export prices had reduced his popularity throughout the colony. In September 1876 he resigned the Premiership to become Agent-General in London.

For almost eight years Vogel dropped out of New Zealand politics and in 1880 severed his connection with the colony altogether. After disputes with the Government over his connection with the New Zealand Agricultural Co., as well as his coming forward as candidate for a Cornish constituency while still representing New Zealand, he resigned the post of Agent-General.

In December 1882 Vogel visited New Zealand as the representative of the Electric Lighting Co.; he repeated the visit in 1883, this time on behalf of the Australian Electric Light, Power and Storage Co. On the second occasion he spent some time surveying the political scene and estimating his chances of re-entering colonial politics. New Zealand was by now dissatisfied with Atkinson's policy of cautious borrowing to finance steady economic development. Seeing this, Vogel put himself forward for the 1884 elections. His lack of popularity in 1876 was forgotten, and he became again the epitome of an almost forgotten "boom" prosperity. With such an electoral appeal he was returned to Parliament for the Christchurch North seat and found himself leader of the largest party, with 33 members of the 91 in the Assembly. With Stout as the nominal head of the Ministry he assumed power on 16 August 1884. The Ministry was defeated by a vote in the House on 28 August. In turn, Atkinson was defeated on 3 September and, again with Stout, Vogel held office until October 1887.

Vogel's final fling in politics was a disaster both for himself and for the colony. After a mildly successful first year in which he resumed borrowing at a rather higher rate than Atkinson had maintained, Vogel found that his policy of keeping depression at a distance by expenditure on public works was not staving off recession. In the face of worsening depression, and the continual defeat of Government on its financial policy, he was forced to fall back on retrenchment before Stout decided to end the humiliation, and the Ministry resigned in 1887. In the ensuing election Vogel was again returned for Christchurch North, but Stout was defeated and the Ministry lost its majority. Atkinson took office in October.

After his Ministry's resignation Vogel returned to London to devote himself to literature and, less successfully, to business. In 1889 he finally severed his political connections with the colony by resigning his seat. Illness and business failure prompted him to apply for a pension from the New Zealand Government. Eventually he was granted £300 a year in 1896, three years before his death. He died at Hillersdon, East Molesey, England, on 12 March 1899, and his widow later received £1,500 as a grant from the New Zealand Government.

Vogel's journalistic and literary activities were as varied as his politics. He was known primarily for articles and speeches associated with politics, but he also prepared an excellent though rather sanguine *Handbook of New Zealand* in 1875. In 1889 he wrote his only novel, *Anno Domini 2000: or Woman's Destiny*, an imaginative and prophetic survey of the future.

Vogel's politics were like his nature, imaginative – and occasionally brilliant – but reckless and speculative. He was an excellent policymaker but he needed a strong leader to restrain him. His sense of timing was excellent, but he lacked the ability to control his followers. Neither was he determined nor strong enough to withstand unpopularity in pursuance of his ideas. To ensure the continuance of his political career he moved from one electorate to another – Christchurch North was the only seat he contested twice – and when he became nationally unpopular he left the country.

Yet Vogel had vision. He saw New Zealand as a potential "Britain of the South Seas", strong both in agriculture and in industry, and inhabited by a large and flourishing population. His beliefs are best illustrated in a passage from a letter he wrote to his friend, W. H. Reynolds, on 27 December 1879.

"I have an absorbing affection for New Zealand," he wrote, "and it is intolerable to me to see its prosperity marred and retarded. – The Statesmen of New Zealand should remember that their work is the heroic one of Colonization – Questions of Whigs and Tories liberals and conservatives are comparatively of little moment to them compared with the one main question of how they can settle in the colony a large happy and contented community."

Vogel was essentially expansionist. From the early days in 1865, when he proposed a scheme to Stafford for the disposal and settlement of native lands by a gigantic lottery, to his final attempt to work an economic miracle with borrowed capital in 1884–87, he had been eager to force the development of the colony to the utmost. He had tried to build up the provinces, but eventually he came to realise their limitations, whereupon he transferred his activities to the national stage and farther. Beyond the level of national politics, expansionism meant extension of the British Empire. In 1876 he protested against Britain's lack of interest in the Pacific, and later warned of German intentions. Even in his last Ministry he had not lost his interest in colonial acquisitions, and in 1884 offered New Zealand capital to pay some of the costs of governing New Guinea.

Vogel was undoubtedly a talented man and a gifted politician. It was unfortunate both for himself and for New Zealand that his abilities could not have been directed along far more profitable lines for the benefit of the colony.

On 19 March 1867, at Dunedin, Vogel married Mary, eldest daughter of W. H. Clayton – a Dunedin architect. Of their family of three sons and one daughter, the eldest son, Henry Benjamin, practised for some years as a solicitor in Wellington. Later he lived in London as a journalist and novelist. Their youngest son, Julius Leonard Fox (1872–94), joined the British Constabulary in Matabeleland (Southern Rhodesia) and was a member of Major Wilson's party who lost their lives in the Shangani River action in 1894. Lady Vogel died on 12 August 1933 at 42 Philbeach Gardens, London S.W. 5.

by **Warwick Robert Armstrong**, M.A., M.SC.ECON.(LOND.), Lecturer, Geography Department, Victoria University of Wellington.

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