

1879.

NEW ZEALAND.

HONORS CONFERRED UPON RESIDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND.

(LETTER FROM THE HON. THE PREMIER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.)

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Sir G. Grey, with the leave of the House.

The Hon. the PREMIER to the Right Hon. the SECRETARY of STATE.

SIR,—

Wellington, New Zealand, 2nd July, 1879.

Recently honors for political services have been, on your advice, conferred upon two leading members of the Opposition in New Zealand. Sir E. Stafford and Sir W. Fox were the recipients of these honors. One of these two gentlemen—Sir W. Fox—was, at the time such honor was conferred, resident in New Zealand. The Government of this country has no knowledge upon whose recommendation you advised that these honors should be conferred. Nor has the Government of this country any certain information in what manner the correspondence regarding them was conducted with Sir W. Fox.

2. In this letter I am not considering honors bestowed, in ordinary course, upon the holders of certain offices, but honors given for political services. I also fully admit the claims and great merits of the two gentlemen on whom they have been conferred.

3. To illustrate the remarks I have to make, I take the case of Sir W. Fox. The honor conferred on him—knighthood—is one known to the Constitution. It emanated from the proper source—the Crown, the fountain of honor. But the recognized rule is that such honors are only conferred by the Crown upon proper responsible advice. The Crown would not, in England, confer peerages upon two leading members of the Opposition, without consulting its actual Responsible Advisers before it adopted such a course.

4. In the present case no such responsible advice was really tendered. The Crown has within this country, under its Constitution, recognized Responsible Advisers. Their advice was never sought; they were not even made the medium of communication between the Crown and Sir W. Fox, and were left in ignorance of the matter. At the time, Sir W. Fox was in violent opposition and making public communications which were embarrassing the Government with the Native race. The action of the Crown, therefore, had the aspect of a party movement of an embarrassing nature.

5. Clearly, in the case of services rendered in any part of the Empire to the Empire at large, the Crown can, on the advice of a Secretary of State, reward such services by honors or otherwise. But in the case of any colony where a representative Constitution exists, in reference to services rendered in such colony in regard to its internal management or its internal political affairs, the Crown cannot, I respectfully believe, constitutionally bestow such honors without the advice of Ministers, who are responsible to the people of that colony. The Secretary of State is not so in any way whatever.

6. Nor can, I believe, any Minister of the Crown in England constitutionally correspond with members of the Opposition, or with any other person in this colony, regarding rewards for political services rendered to the colony and in relation to its internal government, otherwise than through its Responsible Ministers.

7. If such claims, in the instances alluded to, be maintained by the Secretary of State true responsible government in the colony becomes impossible, and a spirit of dissatisfaction will, I fear, be evoked.

The Right Hon. Sir M. Hicks Beach, Bart.,
Downing Street, London.

I have, &c.,
G. GREY.

By Authority: GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1879.