

1881.

## NEW ZEALAND

# PROPOSED ALTERATIONS AND REDUCTIONS IN AGENT-GENERAL'S OFFICE

(CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO).

[In continuation of A.-5C., 1881.]

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency*

## No. 1.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 29th June, 1881.

I now beg to supplement my letter of the 19th May, by a further statement respecting the cost of this department.

When I took charge, the following was the staff in this office, besides the Secretary and the Accountant, respecting whose salaries I lately received your instructions, namely: three clerks and a messenger, costing £534 10s. per annum. The salary of the immigration clerk had, since February, 1879, been charged to immigration, and the rest to the vote for the Agent-General's Office; I am now, however, assuming that for the current financial year the whole will be charged to that vote.

I also found that the rooms used as offices were held under a lease, which could not be terminated before 29th September, 1885, at a rent of £450 a year, with a further provision under the lease to pay £31 4s. a year to the caretaker; and there was also a room used as storeroom, but this I gave up shortly after I took charge. Fifty pounds of the rent is charged to the Audit, according to your instructions of 10th September, 1880.

As regards the offices, they are not only costly, but inconvenient, being in two separate sets. Together, the sets are more than we want; while one set is not enough, and it would not be safe to break a set and share it with strangers; besides which, any subletting of part would most likely entail a loss of £50 a year, as our landlords (the Tontine Association) will not help us to sublet while they have vacant rooms of their own. What I shall do, therefore, is to take the first chance of subletting all the rooms together for the rest of our term, and then take a smaller set, either in these chambers, or in one of the adjacent large buildings newly finished for letting out in flats. In this way, I hope to save about £100 a year in rent.

As regards the staff of the office, if immigration were altogether stopped one clerk could be dispensed with at once. And, supposing (as I expect) the general work to become less than I have found it since I took charge, and immigration not to be renewed on any larger scale, I shall discharge one clerk accordingly; to which effect I have given preparatory notice. I should mention that, though the coming work in the office seems likely to be less than it has been of late, the orders from the departments alone are still of a kind requiring careful attention to details, which takes up time, whether the sum of the orders in any period is large or small.

You desired me, before I left New Zealand, to inquire into the question whether the work of the Audit Officer and the Accountant could not be amalgamated. I thought at that time that it could; then, for some time after I came to England, it seemed to me that it could not: but renewed attention to the matter has lately made me return to my first opinion: and I should make the change now, if I could do it under the Revenues Act, as I am quite sure there is not work for two officers, costing together £700 a year. The offices of Audit Officer, chosen by the Controller-General, and Accountant, appointed by the Government, seem incompatible at first sight, but I think that difficulty might be avoided. In the first place there is one change which might be made at once. In addition to the special duty which the Revenues Act imposes on the Audit Officer, it has been the practice of the Executive Government to give him further positions of responsibility: such for instance, as adding his name to the Agent-General's in the custody of Treasury Bills, and of the bank drafts remitted by the Treasury. It is, of course, a most proper and necessary thing to have a check on the Agent-General, but this check could be more effectually got by making the Secretary the second officer. For instance, the Audit Officer has not received any instructions from the Controller-General, so far as I know, about the bank drafts, and simply indorses them when I request him to do so, without there being any occasion for me to inform him why his indorsement is wanted. This could not be the case with the Secretary. A thoroughly efficient audit of the small payments now passing through this office could be done by one of the eminent public accountants here, as is the case with the immigration expenditure of the Queens-

land Office, at from one-sixth to one-eighth of the cost of our system. And as for the examination of the coupons paid by the Crown Agents, it need not be done in England at all; but the coupon payments could be audited at head-quarters in New Zealand, as is done in respect of the coupons of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland, all of which are sent out to the colonies for audit. There would then only remain the single function to be provided for, which is imposed on the Audit Officer by the Revenues Act, of countersigning the Agent-General's cheques; and I see nothing to prevent the Government appointing the Secretary to be an "officer of the Audit Department," as required by the Act, whereby he would become capable of being "selected" for that single function by the Controller-General, and one salary would be saved altogether.

Summarizing what I have said, the following is the estimate of the office-cost for the present financial year:—

1. Expenditure fixed by the Government, or for which the Government is actually liable:—

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Agent-General ... ..	1,250	0	0			
Secretary ... ..	600	0	0			
Accountant .. ..	300	0	0			
Rent (excluding Audit Office) ..	400	0	0			
Caretaker, under lease .. ..	31	4	0			
	<hr/>			2,581	4	0

2. Expenditure controlled by the Agent-General:—

Clerks (subject to reduction of one)	508	10	0			
Messenger, stationery, postages, and contingencies	250	0	0			
	<hr/>			758	10	0
				<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
				£3,339	14	0

Out of which, perhaps, £250 a year will soon be saved in rent and discharge of one clerk

These figures compare favourably with the cost of the offices of the Australasian Agents-General and the High Commissioner of Canada. I am only permitted to give you the particulars of those departments in confidence, as they have been communicated to me on condition of their not being made public; but I may say in this letter that the cost of the New Zealand office (as above estimated, and not counting the reduction I hope to make) is less by £750 than the least, and of course greatly less than the highest of any other colonial Government office in London.

If you have adopted the recommendation contained in my letter of the 19th May, and taken a vote for £3,500, the Government can be sure from what I have said that the expenditure here will be within the vote. I ought, perhaps, to remind you that the estimate I am making only goes to the ordinary expenditure of the year, and does not include special matters, such as the Wool Exhibition, where Government orders may cause special outlay to be incurred.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

I have, &c.,  
F. D. BELL.

## No. 2.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 22nd July, 1881.

In further reference to the subject of my letters of the 19th May and 29th June, I have now to report what I have done about the offices here.

I told you on the 29th June that I should try to sublet all our rooms together, and take a smaller set; and accordingly I communicated with the Tontine people about a plan for exchanging offices in these chambers. But I found rents had so much increased of late, notwithstanding the huge buildings erected in this street for letting out in flats, that, while the rent of one of our own sets was only £50, rooms much inferior to ours were being let at £60: and the Tontine people not only required £360 for a set of six back rooms on the ground floor—a flight of steps below the street-level, and inferior in every respect to our own—but would call on us to redecorate some of the latter if we gave them up.

I saw, therefore, that it would be no use to move, as we should only be incurring the disadvantage of changing our address (to be avoided, if possible, in a vast place like London) without getting any appreciable saving in return. So I made an arrangement with the Tontine to open a communication between our two sets of rooms, in such a way as would safely shut off two offices for subletting. The alteration will cost very little, while I expect to get a good tenant at from £80 to £100 a year for the rooms to be shut off. In order to induce the Tontine to break an opening through the party wall, I told them we would remain here, which they are, of course, desirous we should do: and I do not think (supposing the agency to be continued) that we shall be able to do better than renew our tenancy when the present lease runs out, for as yet there is no sign that even the extensive building still going on all round will bring down rents in this street.

All the Australasian offices, and the Dominion office, are now together. You will see, by the particulars I am sending you about those departments, that the rents they pay do not compare with ours to our disadvantage.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

I have, &c.,  
F. D. BELL.

## No. 3.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 28th July, 1881.

Adverting to the latter part of my letter of the 29th June respecting the cost of this office, it may be as well to note that the difference between that cost and the cost of the least of the other

offices is more than I then said. You will observe, from the table contained in the (printed) confidential despatch on the subject, which goes to the Premier by this mail, that the difference is as follows:—

The New Zealand office, at present, costs less—						£	s.	d.
Than South Australia	...	...	...	...	...	850	0	0
„ Queensland	...	...	...	...	...	898	0	0
„ New South Wales	...	...	..	...	...	904	0	0
„ Victoria	..	...	..	..	..	1,195	0	0
„ Canada	..	..	...	..	..	3,630	0	0

And will shortly show a further difference, as you will have seen from my letters of the 29th June and 22nd instant.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

F D. BELL.

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