

1888.  
NEW ZEALAND.

# PROPOSED ACQUISITION OF NEW HEBRIDES BY FRANCE.

(PAPERS RELATING THERETO.)

[In Continuation of A.—6, 1887, Session II.]

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

No. 1.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 6th May, 1887.

At the Conference on the 26th April the Secretary of State laid before the Delegates the proposals of Her Majesty's Government relating to the New Hebrides.

I am not yet able to send you the confidential paper in which these proposals are stated, but I may give you the following brief summary of it.

After reciting the history of the understanding come to in 1878, and renewed in 1883, for the independence of the islands, and the proposals of the French Government in January, 1886, as well as the history of the military posts established last June, Her Majesty's Government stated that, while fully alive to the importance of maintaining the agreement of 1878–83 in its integrity, they were not entitled to object to any action which might be taken for the protection of French subjects and their interests in the New Hebrides, nor to dictate any particular time when the French troops must be withdrawn; nor did they think it necessary or desirable to place in the islands any corresponding detachments of British troops, in the face of the repeated assurances given by the French Government that there was no desire or intention on their part to infringe the agreement. But, as British interests ought to be maintained concurrently with French interests in the group, they had proposed to the Government of the Republic the appointment of a joint French and English Naval Commission for the protection of the subjects of both nationalities. This proposal was accepted by the French Government, who undertook that the evacuation of the islands by their troops should take place upon the settlement of regulations for the guidance of the joint Naval Commission. These regulations, with various draft bases of arrangements, and counter-proposals on each side, had been the subject of diplomatic communications between the two Governments for some months; and M. Flourens, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, had told Lord Lyons he was now on the point of sending instructions to the French Ambassador in London to bring the question to a settlement.

After hearing what the Delegates had to say on these proposals, Lord Salisbury made an explanation on the part of Her Majesty's Government. This will soon be communicated to you in a telegram, and therefore I do not refer to it further here.

On the 2nd May a discussion upon the New Hebrides question took place in the House of Lords, and I now transmit herewith a *Times* report of the debate. You will observe that Lord Salisbury announced that he was expecting to receive the promised communication from M. Waddington during this week, and I have no doubt of being able to telegraph its purport to you in a few days.

The discussion on the 26th April was renewed on the 28th, when the explanations given by Lord Salisbury were criticized by Mr. Service and other delegates, and supported in substance by Sir William Fitzherbert and myself. You will be glad to hear that in the end all the delegates expressed the opinion that the proposals of Her Majesty's Government should be accepted as a basis upon which to carry on the negotiations between the two Governments.

I have, &c.,

F. D. BELL.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

1—A. 4.