

1894.
NEW ZEALAND.

FOX CORRESPONDENCE COMMISSION.

REPORT BY THE ROYAL COMMISSIONER ON THE FOX CORRESPONDENCE, TOGETHER WITH MINUTES OF EVIDENCE; ALSO DECLARATION BY MR. E. T. GILLON, EDITOR OF THE *EVENING POST*, WITH REFERENCE TO THE CORRESPONDENCE.

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by the Hon. Mr. Seddon with the leave of the House.

To His Excellency the Right Honourable David, Earl of Glasgow, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over Her Majesty's Colony of New Zealand and its Dependencies, and Vice-Admiral of the same.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

Under the Commission issued by your Excellency, and dated the 24th April, 1894, and extended by a Commission dated the 4th June, 1894, I, the Commissioner duly appointed for the purpose of inquiring into and reporting upon the circumstances attending the publication of the contents of Colonel Fox's letters to the Premier in the *Evening Post* newspaper of the 4th April, 1894, have the honour to report as follows:—

The letters of Colonel Fox to the Premier, which form the subject-matter of this inquiry, were written on the 16th March, 1894. Colonel Fox kept a rough draft of them, and press copies of them appear in the official letter-book of the department. The original letters were posted on the 16th March to the Hon. the Premier at Auckland. Although there is no doubt that some of the salient features of these letters were known to Colonel Hume, Colonel Newall, Captain Coleman, and several other gentlemen, through Colonel Fox, the original letters, the press copies, or the rough drafts were never seen by any of them until after the 4th April, and unless they had seen them prior to the 4th April it was quite impossible for any of them to have given to the *Evening Post* the information contained in its issue of the 4th April, the wording of which is, word for word and paragraph for paragraph, almost identical with the original letters, with the exception that the paragraphs as they appear in the *Evening Post* do not appear in the same sequence as in the original letters. Had a representative of the newspaper in question been able to obtain access to either of these three sources of information prior to the 4th April, the probability is that the information so obtained would have been published immediately. It is clear that, although Mr. Hoben, a reporter of the *Evening Post*, may have ascertained from outside sources a good deal of information concerning the contents of Colonel Fox's letters, I do not think it possible that any person connected with the *Evening Post* could have obtained access to these letters, or to any copies or drafts of them, prior to the 4th April. Colonel Fox's evidence clearly shows that the rough drafts never left his possession, and in his evidence he states that "they were locked up from that time, and nobody has seen my rough copies." The official letter-book of the office containing the press copies was locked up every night, and was not shown to any unauthorised person. There is also the sworn evidence of Colonel Fox to the effect that, in a conversation with Mr. Hoben, he (Colonel Fox) said, "I should be very much obliged if you would give me a direct assurance, if you can do so, that the information has not come from my office." Mr. Hoben replied, "You may take my word for it that the information has not come from the Defence Office." Had it been possible for the information contained in the *Evening Post* of the 4th April to have been obtained from the rough drafts in Colonel Fox's possession, or from the press copies in the official letter-book of the department, it would have been possible for it to have been obtained prior to the 4th April, and there would therefore have been no necessity for Mr. Hoben to interview Sir Patrick Buckley on the morning of the 4th April in order to obtain the required information. I am of opinion that the only manner in which the information could have been obtained was through the medium of some person having the custody or control of the *original* letters.

It is important to note that on the morning of the date of the publication of these letters—namely, the 4th April—the Chief Messenger's record-book records the fact that at 10.10 a.m. Messenger Mason left the Government Buildings with a lot of letters for delivery in town. Amongst these letters was one addressed to the *Evening Post*, and one for W. H. Atack. The letter addressed to Mr. Atack contained information from the Registrar-General's Department regarding agricultural statistics. Although I have made very diligent inquiry, I have not been able to ascertain what information was contained in the letter addressed to the *Evening Post*, but I find that it did not