

New Caledonia's Plight.

Recent files from Noumea reflect strongly the discontent existing in New Caledonia with the present system of Government. This has found expression in articles and letters published in the newspapers and in the speeches of members of the General Council in discussing the budget, and, incidentally, certain fresh taxation which the Governor proposed to raise. The result has been that the agitation, which has been going on in a desultory manner for over two years, asking that New Caledonia be ceded to Great Britain, has achieved considerable proportions throughout the island.

The determination of the people to adopt radical measures is shown by the temper of the General Council during the present session.


At a meeting of the council on November 26, a statement from the Governor was read which urged the members to acquiesce in the passing of a bill to impose fresh taxation. When Governor Richard arrived in the colony, six months ago, he was met by a horde of creditors to whom both the colony and the town of Noumea were unable to pay back money borrowed, or owing for services rendered. Some of the larger contractors threatened legal proceedings, reckoning on the loan from France, the Governor had temporised, but as the promised money had not yet come, it was absolutely necessary to raise some by other methods, or else acknowledge the colony as bankrupt. Last month the salaries of civil servants were only paid with difficulty, and he was in doubt whether the Government would be able to meet that obligation at the end of this month.

Instead of discussing the proposed measures at once, the council decided to revise the expenses of administration, and after long discussion the amount was cut down by 78,000 francs.

On December 8 Governor Richard addressed another letter to the Assembly, calling on it to revise its decisions regarding these "reductions impossible of accomplishment. I make a supreme appeal," he said, "to those who are striving for the relief of New Caledonia." The council's answer to this was a unanimous vote confirming its previous deliberations, and refusing to reopen the discussion. Matters were at this stage when the "Australien" sailed.

Meanwhile a number of letters from colonists have appeared in the newspapers in favour of secession. "Indignation at the apathy of the French Government has become so intense," says one writer, "that almost the whole of the population is looking to the Australian Commonwealth to save it from complete ruin."

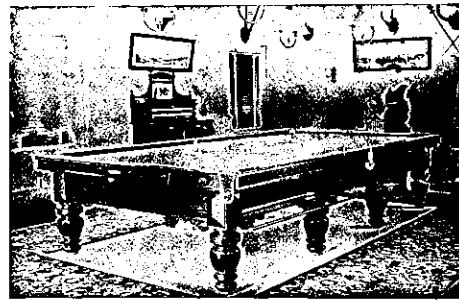
The "France Australe," which does not favour secession of the island to England, reprints a long article by Monsieur Brara d'Aunet, formerly French Consul at Sydney, who ridicules the idea of France giving up New Caledonia, though he admits that the prosperity of the island cannot be compared with that of Australia or New Zealand, although, in proportion, it is much richer. "One cannot doubt," he says, "that if this island had fallen into the hands of the English fifty years ago, it would now be as flourishing as the neighbouring British colonies." The course he advises, therefore, is not secession, but the adoption of the same principles of colonial government which Great Britain has tried with so much success.



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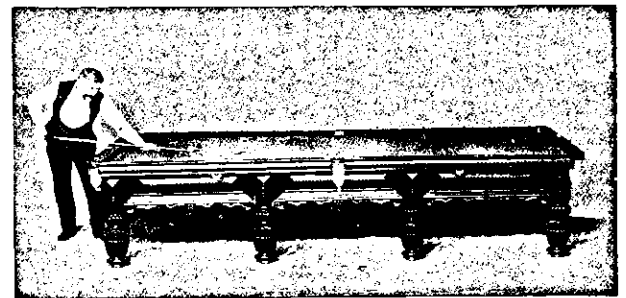
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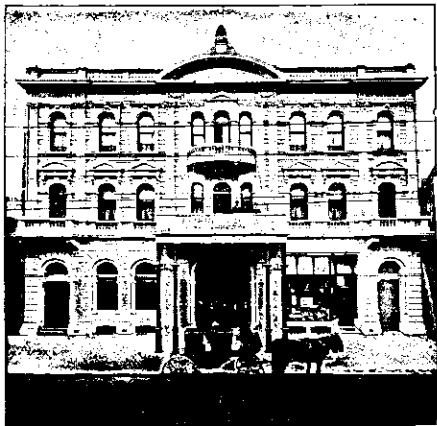
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