

Late in 1888 the number of copies of each volume seems to have been reduced from 2,500 to 1,500. Great efforts were made to off-load what was becoming a worrying stockpile of books upon a suitable English publisher. A disappointingly small number of copies was eventually accepted by the publishing house of Sampson Low.⁴⁸ Soon after, the Colonial Secretary authorised the presentation of a free copy to any public library in New Zealand which asked for one.⁴⁹ In the midst of all this Grey complained that White was incorporating too much from Grey's own publications and alluded to the possibility of court action. White denied such an accusation, though he began seeking permission from authors before quoting their writings.⁵⁰ References to Grey emerged again the following year in a memorandum from the Colonial Secretary who, perhaps tired of the entire project, suggested paying White off and employing Grey, which he maintained had been part of the original agreement.⁵¹

The Colonial Secretary's outburst resulted from a disagreement between two government departments about White's salary. In August 1889 Native Department officials noticed that their colleagues in the Colonial Secretary's Department had made no provision for his salary in their vote. They argued strongly that the history be carried through to completion.⁵² After the Colonial Secretary's unhelpful suggestion to ditch White entirely, a new Secretary, W. R. Russell, accepted the Native Department's argument to continue payments while the matter was submitted to Cabinet. Cabinet in turn decided the salary should be met from unauthorised expenditure. None the less the Colonial Secretary's Department continued to resist supplying the funds for another month and processed payment only after ministerial intervention.⁵³ The project's financial future had become so precarious that White was advised against taking extended leave of absence, and warned his salary might be struck off the estimates before the end of the next Parliamentary session.⁵⁴

The end came on 30 July 1890. A motion was put in Parliament to have the item struck off. Speakers complained about the lack of deadlines and the costs. No one spoke in the project's favour. The government presented only token arguments, mentioning that it was considered a work of great importance but not supporting the item either way. The amendment to strike it off received support from members of the Liberal opposition, including Joseph Ward, William Pember Reeves and John Ballance. No division was called for and the item was struck out.⁵⁵ White himself was officially informed only in September that it had been decided to terminate his services after 30 September 1890. He was thanked for his past services in 'adding to the historical knowledge of the colony'.⁵⁶

In spite of all the delays, the disputes and the general muddle-headedness of those involved, much progress had been achieved in those last years. The fifth and sixth volumes were issued, while at the date