

1880.

NEW ZEALAND.

FRENCH CONVICTS FROM NEW CALEDONIA.

(PAPERS RESPECTING THE ARRIVAL AT AUCKLAND OF PARDONED COMMUNISTS AND CRIMINALS.)

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

No. 1.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Colonial Secretary's Office, N.Z., Wellington, 28th February, 1880.

I have the honor to forward herewith copies of telegrams* that have passed between us respecting the arrival in New Zealand of liberated Communists and criminals from New Caledonia.

2. The circumstances which caused my telegrams were these:—On the 18th instant, the Government received information from the Minister resident in Auckland, that the schooner "Griffin," chartered by the French Government, had arrived in the Manukau Harbour from New Caledonia, bringing "eleven political offenders and nine convicts for criminal offences," all of them having been conditionally released. Subsequently, the Minister made further inquiries, and reported that, so far as he could ascertain, the information first sent was correct. He also transmitted to the Government an extract from a letter written by a British shipping agent in New Caledonia, stating specifically that he had "booked for Auckland" a number of passengers who were waiting for passages by a schooner expected from Hiscock Island, and that, "should favourable news be received here from the passengers per 'Griffin,' there will be a number more to go from this place." I hereupon telegraphed to the Governments of New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria, repeating the information before stated, and asking whether those colonies had been similarly treated, and whether they would join New Zealand in urging the Imperial Government to remonstrate with France against permitting a repetition, on the part of its representatives in New Caledonia, of proceedings so likely to prove highly injurious to these colonies. The Chief Secretary of New South Wales replied, "Batches of pardoned convicts from New Caledonia have, on several occasions, arrived here;" while from Queensland I was informed that "on two or three occasions escaped Communists have reached our coasts, but not, as far as we are aware, with the connivance of the French authorities." Both these Governments explained what had been attempted by them in the way of legislating against the landing of foreign convicts, political or criminal: but as to this I need not enter into details. Both also readily agreed to join in a remonstrance through the Agents-General for the Colonies. From Victoria, no answer was received, owing, doubtless, to the general election which is proceeding there.

3. Upon receiving the replies from New South Wales and Queensland, I forwarded my first telegram to you; and a copy of that message was transmitted to each of the three colonies.

4. A very strong feeling of indignation was aroused in Auckland by the landing of the criminals, and the police there, acting under the directions of the Government, sought to ascertain the crimes, sentences, and conditions of release of the men individually. These inquiries showed that, while it was true that the Government of New Caledonia chartered the "Griffin," and paid for the passages of the liberated Communists, the nine freed criminals paid for their own passages. It was also ascertained that, while the amnestied Communists are not at liberty to enter any French territory, the men convicted of ordinary crimes had served their sentences, and when they left New Caledonia were, so far as the operation of French law is concerned, free to go to any other French colony, or to return to France. A copy of the police report is appended.

5. This information, of course, greatly modified the case. However unfriendly it may have been on the part of the French authorities to send to New Zealand conditionally-freed political offenders, and, to a certain extent, to facilitate the coming hither of freed criminal convicts, the proceeding was shown to be less grave in character than it would have been if those criminal convicts had been sent here at the cost of the French authorities, while an essential condition of their freedom was that they should not re-enter France or land in French territory.

6. I accordingly despatched to you my second telegram, which was crossed by your answer to my first; and I informed New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria of the changed circumstances.

7. I have said that the action of the French authorities is, at the least, a most unfriendly one towards New Zealand. But it would seem that a breach of a distinct promise by the French Govern-

* For all enclosures, see those to No. 2.