

1884.
—
VICTORIA.

HIGH COMMISSIONERSHIP OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC.

DESPATCH FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES
SUGGESTING AN AUSTRALIAN SUBSIDY.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND.

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(Copy.)

The Earl of Derby to the Officer Administering the Government of Victoria.

VICTORIA, No. 24.

SIR,

Downing-street, 9th May, 1884.

Her Majesty's Government have not lost sight of the resolutions adopted by the Convention of representatives of the Australasian Colonies at Sydney in December last, and have considered the provisions of the Draft Bill for constituting a Federal Council which the representatives pledge themselves to submit to the Legislatures of their respective colonies. I had been led to believe that Addresses in favour of this Bill would be adopted by the Colonial Legislatures in time to enable Her Majesty's Government to introduce the measure during the present session of Parliament with a good prospect of its being passed; but the necessary action does not appear to have been yet taken in any colony. As therefore the probability of legislation during this year is diminishing, it appears desirable to consider the position of Her Majesty's Government and of the Colonial Governments in regard to the proposals of the Convention.

2. I had explained, in my despatch of July 11th, 1883, to the Administrator of the Government of Queensland, which was before the Convention, that, in order to place Her Majesty's Government in a position to consider proposals for the protection or government of New Guinea or other places in the Western Pacific Ocean, it was desirable for the Australasian Colonies to combine together effectively, and provide the cost of carrying out any policy which it might be decided to adopt, and that in the meantime Her Majesty's Government must continue to decline proposals for large annexations of territory adjacent to Australia, adding that, if a reasonable annual sum were provided by the colonies, Her Majesty's Government would be prepared to strengthen the naval force on the Australian station, and make the High Commissionership more effective.

3. The Convention does not appear to have taken this part of my despatch into consideration, but it agreed that the Governments represented at it should recommend their respective Legislatures to make permanent provision in proportion to population, for the cost of the policy advocated, namely:—

- (1.) To check, in whatever manner might be deemed wisest and most effectual, the further acquisition of dominion in the Pacific, south of the equator, by any Foreign Power.
- (2.) To secure the incorporation with the British Empire of so much of New Guinea and the small islands adjacent thereto as is not claimed by the Government of the Netherlands; and
- (3.) To acquire, if possible, the control of the New Hebrides, in the interests of Australasia.

The Legislature of Queensland has recorded its entire concurrence in these resolutions, but no colony has taken measures to provide the requisite funds, as suggested by the Convention.

4. As therefore, in the absence of any joint action by the colonies, Her Majesty's Government are not in a position to deal with those questions of policy to which I have referred, and some further delay seems unavoidable, it may be desirable that your Government should consider with the Governments of the other Australasian Colonies whether there may not be advantage in making provision for the intervening period in the manner suggested by me in paragraph 7 of my despatch of July 11th last to Sir A. H. Palmer. As I then stated, Her Majesty's Government are confident that no Foreign Power contemplates interference with New Guinea; but, in the absence of any controlling authority, it is always possible that the subjects of a Foreign Power might require the protection or intervention of their Government, and British subjects, also, by coming into collision with the natives, or by setting up claims to land, might cause complications which would give much trouble hereafter.

5. Her Majesty's Government are disposed to think that there should be a High Commissioner, or at least a Deputy-Commissioner with large powers of independent action, stationed on or near the eastern coasts of New Guinea, and that he should be furnished with a steamship, independent of Her Majesty's Naval Squadron, and with a staff sufficient to enable him to exercise protection in the name of the Queen over those shores. The cost of this arrangement cannot be accurately estimated, as I have previously stated, but if one or more colonies will secure to Her Majesty's Government the payment of a sum of (say) £15,000 during the year ending 1st June, 1885, they will be prepared to take immediate steps for establishing the High Commissioner's jurisdiction, and will render to the contributing Governments an account of the expenditure incurred. It would be possible, after some months, to determine whether this arrangement should be further continued, and to consider fully with the Colonial Governments (or with the Federal Council, if established) what arrangements should be made for the future supervision of the labour trade, if it should be decided that it can continue to be allowed. Her Majesty's Government have come to no conclusions as to the recommendations of the Western Pacific Committee, in regard to which the colonies should first be consulted; but I think it doubtful whether it will be found practicable to place the regulation of the labour traffic under Imperial control.

6. I may state, in conclusion, that the annual expenditure of this country in the maintenance of the squadron on the Australian station, including schooners and surveying vessels, is estimated as amounting at present to about £157,000.

I need hardly add that it is desirable that I should learn, as soon as possible, the result of the careful consideration which I trust that this despatch will receive from your Government, in conjunction with the Governments of the other Australasian Colonies.

I have, &c.,

(Sgd.)

DERBY.