

1884.

—  
VICTORIA.

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WESTERN PACIFIC HIGH COMMISSION.

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CORRESPONDENCE

RESPECTING THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY  
APPOINTED BY H. M. IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT.

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

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By Authority :

JOHN FERRES, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.



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## CORRESPONDENCE.

P. 84/974.

THE AGENT-GENERAL TO THE PREMIER.

*Report of Western Pacific Commission.*

No. 781/84.

8 Victoria Chambers, Victoria-street,  
Westminster, S.W., 14th March, 1884.

SIR,

Referring to the "Report of a Commission appointed to inquire into the working of the Western Pacific Order in Council," forwarded to you by the last mail, I have the honour to inform you that on my return from Paris I examined this document, which I found to traverse completely the resolutions passed by the Convention of the Australasian Colonies, with reference to the measures then recommended for the management of the Western Pacific. It further appeared to be diametrically opposed to the valuable suggestions made by Sir W. Des Vœux, in the paper laid by him before the Convention, and to convey an altogether undeserved reflection on the Australasian Colonies. Whatever might be the force of the arguments against entrusting the management of New Guinea, or other Western Pacific islands, to a single colony, such as Queensland, these could not, in my opinion, be considered applicable, as this Report would imply, to a Council of Confederation, where the majority would consist of representatives, who could have nothing but a good motive in undertaking such costly and laborious supervision. I therefore invited the Agents-General of the other colonies to meet for the purpose of considering what, if any, notice should be taken of the Report, and what communications we should address to our Governments on the subject. Sir F. Dillon Bell, Sir Saul Samuel, and Mr. Hemmants (Acting Agent-General for Queensland), accordingly attended here yesterday. After perusing the language of the Report, and collating it with the resolutions passed by the Convention, we arrived at the conclusion that, in the absence of specific instructions from our Governments to meet such a contingency, we were scarcely justified in independent action, but it was agreed that we should call attention to the subject in our despatches by present mail. Possibly we may adopt the view that it is desirable to place you in possession of information by telegraph, but it appears difficult to convey, without considerable expenditure, the full meaning of the Report. I trust, however, that the various Australasian Governments may see fit to address, either directly or through their Agents-General, some communication to the Colonial Office in reply to the suggestions of Sir A. Gordon and his associates.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

ROBT. MURRAY SMITH.

THE HONORABLE  
THE PREMIER,  
MELBOURNE.

P. 84/1001.

TELEGRAM.

THE PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND TO THE PREMIER OF VICTORIA.

BRISBANE, 21st April, 1884.

I have just received Report of Western Pacific Commission, and have instructed Agent-General by cable to protest against the interference with Colonial affairs as recommended by the Commissioners. Last week promulgated most stringent regulations for governing the Island labour trade, and are determined to suppress abuses. I hope you will instruct your Agent-General to support this view.

S. W. GRIFFITH.

P. 84/1045.

TELEGRAM.

THE PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND TO THE PREMIER OF VICTORIA.

BRISBANE, 24th April, 1884.

My telegram to Agent-General was as follows :—

“Western Pacific Report received. Stringent regulations promulgated. Make protest against interference with Colonial affairs. Colonial Government firmly determined suppress abuses.”

Some of this was in code cipher. Much of my time has been occupied in investigating the abuses of the trade, and, as the result, regulations, which will be strictly enforced, were published last week. They cover nearly all the ground recommended by the Commissioners, and in some respects go further. I regard the proposal to take the business out of our hands (except as a last resort, and after we have shown our unwillingness or inability to purify the traffic) as a serious interference with our right of self-government. This is a matter almost exclusively regarding Queensland, and in which, for the credit of the Colony, prompt action was necessary. With this exception, however, I am disposed to agree with the Report, which does not much, if at all, exaggerate the abuses as they have come under my own notice. You will remember that I did not agree to the conduct of the labour traffic being given to the Federal Council.

S. W. GRIFFITH.

No. 84/1824.

THE PREMIER OF VICTORIA TO THE AGENT-GENERAL.

PREMIER'S OFFICE,  
MELBOURNE, 14th July, 1884.

SIR,

Your letter of the 14th March, No. 781, respecting the Royal Commission on the working of the Western Pacific Order in Council, has already been acknowledged.

2. I have not, however, so far, felt it necessary to take further specific notice of the Report, since your later letter (quoted in the margin) rendered it clear that the document was far from being endorsed by the Imperial Government. Mr. Evelyn Ashley's note transmitted by you states :—

“That the Government had laid on the Table, at the request of honorable members, the Report of the Pacific Committee, though they did not agree with many of the views and statements therein expressed, and of course were in no way responsible for that Report.”

No. 879.

Dated 21 March.

A statement in these terms from the Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Colonies, of course, relieved me from the necessity of taking cognizance of the document—at all events, for the time—and this is now confirmed by the Secretary of State's despatch of the 9th of May ultimo, a copy of which is enclosed in your letter no. 1699. of the 16th idem. Lord Derby therein states as follows:—

“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.”

With this measure of disavowal, I am glad to be relieved of the necessity of treating the matter *in extenso*.

3. I cannot feel it right, however, to quit the subject without observing that, if the document were proposed to be taken up by Her Majesty's Imperial Government, I should feel it incumbent upon me to object, not alone to the erroneousness of many of its statements, but also to the tone of superiority to Australasian communities which is assumed by the three gentlemen constituting the Committee.

In paragraph 86, for instance, referring to the important movement for Annexation which has agitated every part of Australasia, and been taken up with all but unanimity in every Colony, the Committee say that it is unnecessary “seriously” (*sic*) to combat the proposal. Were I dealing formally with the document, I should submit that this is not a properly respectful style in which to refer to opinions and proposals of Ministers of the Crown in the Colonies, to resolutions of Legislatures, and to the public sentiment of three millions of Her Majesty's subjects.

4. As I have taken notice of the paragraph, perhaps I ought to point out that it quite misrepresents the Annexation movement. It has never been intended in that movement, as the paragraph implies, to act in disregard of treaty obligations, and, therefore, the objections set out in the paragraph are those which lie against an imaginary Annexation movement, not against the one of actual fact which we have espoused.

5. The paragraph goes on to say that the Committee are persuaded that the scheme of Annexation will meet with an unfavorable reception from Her Majesty's Government. I must beg to object to those gentlemen assuming to say what the decision of Her Majesty's Imperial Government will be upon the representations of the Australasian Colonies. To do so is objectionable on two grounds: first, as regards the Imperial Government, whose decision is thus prescribed, if not dictated; and secondly, as regards the Colonies, whose case is both prejudiced and prejudged.

6. In paragraph 88, the Committee say that “*it may be assumed with absolute certainty*” that, were Annexation effected, the government of every group would “*unquestionably*” in fact, and probably in name also, fall into the hands of the white residents in it. I must question the wisdom of any persons who will assume to say with *absolute certainty* what any future event will be. But not only is the predicted event future, but it is also extremely doubtful in its nature. There is at least one alternative to what is thus assumed with “*absolute certainty*,” namely—and this seems to me by far the most probable occurrence—the government of each group might be, both in name and in fact also, in the hands of the Australasian Federal Authority just as much as the government of India is in the hands of the Imperial Government.

7. One other point I am compelled to notice and to protest against. The document is pervaded by unconcealed distrust of the justice and equity of Australasian communities, whom it represents as quite unfit to be charged with the interests of the indigenous races. This reflection, perhaps, is primarily intended for the Northern Colonies, whom I need not presume to vindicate; but, so far as Victoria is concerned, the movement for Annexation, while it has undoubtedly evoked an enthusiastic sentiment as a quasi-national matter, is otherwise espoused to a great extent for purely philanthropic motives. Victoria is, I am glad to say, the seat of a great deal of philanthropic feeling and energy on this subject, and no movement, which had for its object to wrong or oppress the native races, would receive one iota of sympathy from her Government or her people.

8. Generally on the subject, I may observe that it seems to me that a high task and opportunity is offered to Australasia in this matter. Too often the contact of civilization with savagery has been not only the destruction of savagery but of the savages too. There is room yet for a great and noble experiment ; it remains for Australasia to see whether the inferior races cannot be befriended as well as employed—at once utilized and elevated. I sincerely hope that it will be in this light and in this spirit that Federated Australasia will one day succeed, and that ere long, to the possession of the Islands ; and I trust that a Federal Council of Australasian statesmen will be able to devise such means and safeguards as will allow of black labour being righteously and humanely employed—some just and sagacious method that will enable the dark and white races to co-exist, and to conjointly develop the wonderful resources of these territories.

9. In conclusion, I must say that I fully recognise the sound judgment of the Imperial Government in hesitating to endorse this Report. I would explain that my object in referring to the foregoing points is simply to show the unreliable, and indeed the unphilosophic, character of the Report, and to indicate what must be the attitude of these Colonies towards the document, if it should be drawn forth by the Imperial Government from the position of doubtful regard, in which, according to the quotations at the commencement of this letter, it at present stands.

I thank you for your own observations upon the subject (in which I entirely concur), and I would suggest that it might be advantageous to transmit to the Right Honorable the Secretary of State for the Colonies a copy of this letter and of your own.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

JAMES SERVICE,

Premier.

R. MURRAY SMITH, Esquire, C.M.G.,  
Agent-General for Victoria,  
London.