

1881.

NEW ZEALAND

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS AND REDUCTIONS IN AGENT-GENERAL'S OFFICE

(CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO).

[In continuation of A.-5C., 1881.]

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

No. 1.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 29th June, 1881.

I now beg to supplement my letter of the 19th May, by a further statement respecting the cost of this department.

When I took charge, the following was the staff in this office, besides the Secretary and the Accountant, respecting whose salaries I lately received your instructions, namely: three clerks and a messenger, costing £534 10s. per annum. The salary of the immigration clerk had, since February, 1879, been charged to immigration, and the rest to the vote for the Agent-General's Office; I am now, however, assuming that for the current financial year the whole will be charged to that vote.

I also found that the rooms used as offices were held under a lease, which could not be terminated before 29th September, 1885, at a rent of £450 a year, with a further provision under the lease to pay £31 4s. a year to the caretaker; and there was also a room used as storeroom, but this I gave up shortly after I took charge. Fifty pounds of the rent is charged to the Audit, according to your instructions of 10th September, 1880.

As regards the offices, they are not only costly, but inconvenient, being in two separate sets. Together, the sets are more than we want; while one set is not enough, and it would not be safe to break a set and share it with strangers; besides which, any subletting of part would most likely entail a loss of £50 a year, as our landlords (the Tontine Association) will not help us to sublet while they have vacant rooms of their own. What I shall do, therefore, is to take the first chance of subletting all the rooms together for the rest of our term, and then take a smaller set, either in these chambers, or in one of the adjacent large buildings newly finished for letting out in flats. In this way, I hope to save about £100 a year in rent.

As regards the staff of the office, if immigration were altogether stopped one clerk could be dispensed with at once. And, supposing (as I expect) the general work to become less than I have found it since I took charge, and immigration not to be renewed on any larger scale, I shall discharge one clerk accordingly; to which effect I have given preparatory notice. I should mention that, though the coming work in the office seems likely to be less than it has been of late, the orders from the departments alone are still of a kind requiring careful attention to details, which takes up time, whether the sum of the orders in any period is large or small.

You desired me, before I left New Zealand, to inquire into the question whether the work of the Audit Officer and the Accountant could not be amalgamated. I thought at that time that it could; then, for some time after I came to England, it seemed to me that it could not: but renewed attention to the matter has lately made me return to my first opinion: and I should make the change now, if I could do it under the Revenues Act, as I am quite sure there is not work for two officers, costing together £700 a year. The offices of Audit Officer, chosen by the Controller-General, and Accountant, appointed by the Government, seem incompatible at first sight, but I think that difficulty might be avoided. In the first place there is one change which might be made at once. In addition to the special duty which the Revenues Act imposes on the Audit Officer, it has been the practice of the Executive Government to give him further positions of responsibility: such for instance, as adding his name to the Agent-General's in the custody of Treasury Bills, and of the bank drafts remitted by the Treasury. It is, of course, a most proper and necessary thing to have a check on the Agent-General, but this check could be more effectually got by making the Secretary the second officer. For instance, the Audit Officer has not received any instructions from the Controller-General, so far as I know, about the bank drafts, and simply indorses them when I request him to do so, without there being any occasion for me to inform him why his indorsement is wanted. This could not be the case with the Secretary. A thoroughly efficient audit of the small payments now passing through this office could be done by one of the eminent public accountants here, as is the case with the immigration expenditure of the Queens-