

be obtained. Therefore, they told us that this Convention must be accepted or rejected as a whole. - Fourteenth Day.
9 May 1907.

Now I take it that anyone who has followed this simple statement of the course of events will realise that those who have heard the statements made in public in this country with reference to the manner in which this Convention is formed may be pardoned if they have arrived at an entirely misleading view of the circumstances. To say that a correspondence with us had been proceeding for many years is perfectly true, but quite irrelevant to the making of this Convention. To say that we were consulted at every step is an abuse of language, so far as that Convention is concerned. To lead anyone to suppose that the Commonwealth or its Government had the faintest tittle of responsibility for either this Commission or the personnel of this Commission, matters on which I think we were fully entitled to be heard, or to allow it to be supposed that we knew anything of that Commission, its purposes, character, or work, or of this Convention until we saw it complete, is to convey a series of wholly mistaken impressions. We knew nothing until we received this Convention with an intimation that it must be either taken as a whole or left.

BRITISH
INTERESTS IN
THE PACIFIC.
(Mr. Deakin.)

I do not think that this procedure is capable of any defence except by the frank statement that it was due to an entire oversight, that Australia and New Zealand had dropped out of view, that the able gentlemen who represented the British Government on that Convention being capable and well informed, it was not necessary for us to be consulted; that they knew better what we wanted than we did ourselves, or at all events were better judges of what ought to be done in the New Hebrides than we could be. Any one of those statements might be made, and I do not contradict it. All I am concerned to insist upon now is that there should be no pretence that any respect whatever was paid or sought to be paid to the opinion of Australia, or any recognition given to us in a very serious matter on which we certainly were entitled to be consulted, or at least informed, at every step. We were not even informed of what was taking place except through the newspapers. That it should be possible at the centre of the Empire to conduct a negotiation upon matters of grave importance which had been the subject of correspondence for 24 years between the Colonial Office and the self-governing communities concerned and which was of great moment to Imperial interests in the Pacific in this casual and secret fashion, is, I think, the strongest possible impeachment of the methods that have obtained in this office.

It is not because I wish to return to the past, but to defend our action and to prevent the possibility of anything of this kind recurring in the future, that I have recapitulated these incidents. But when I find in the House of Commons a question asked on the 19th February of the Under Secretary for the Colonies relating to the New Hebrides referring to matters upon which we had been in correspondence with this Department, I have again to submit that the methods which make this possible are certainly in need of entire reform. The question was asked by Mr Whitehead and will be found in column 708 of the Parliamentary Hansard: "I beg to ask the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he is aware that the protective tariff in force in the Australian Commonwealth applies to maize, copra, and other products of the New Hebrides, and has been a cause in limiting the number of British settlers and retarding the development of British interest in those islands and whether, in event of further representations being made by the Australian Government with a view to Australian predominance in the New Hebrides, His Majesty's Government will endeavour to persuade the Australian Government to encourage British settlement by offering a free market in the Commonwealth to British merchandise ex-