

Fourteenth Day.

9 May 1907.

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BRITISH
INTERESTS IN
THE PACIFIC.

(Mr. Deakin.)

was with Sydney only. That is one of the ridiculous insinuations of the writer. The New Hebrides enjoyed an absolutely free port, which was and is the only port with which they have any trade; they sent all their goods to New South Wales, where they were all absolutely free until we imposed the Commonwealth tariff in 1901. Instead of their being liable to duty over a long series of years, they had Free Trade all the time up till 1901. In 1901, 1902, and 1903, our new duties had no effect, because the demand for maize was so exceptional. Instead of operating over a long period of years, our tariff had only operated for two years, 1904 and 1905.

Now, what is the fact? Mr. Whitehead suggests that our policy has limited the number of British settlers. The Commonwealth Government, at an expense of several thousands of pounds, has planted British settlers in the New Hebrides, and endeavoured afterwards to give them a tariff concession. Will it be believed that at the time this answer was given in addition to that I obtained from the House a sum of 500*l.* to pay to these very settlers? They are only a handful of maize growers, and this sum enabled us to make up to them the difference caused by the effect of our tariff. We are paying out of our own pocket enough to enable these people not to be affected by our duties.

What is the knowledge in this office? All these facts have been published in our newspapers; we are actually spending our own money to prevent these people being affected by our tariff, and have tried to grant them a preferential tariff. Then when a question in the House of Commons directly implies that we who had put settlers there were injuring them, and doing nothing to help them, the only answer given is that we are only proposing to do something in the future. All these circumstances were ignored; the fact is, that we have taken the greatest possible pains to endeavour to help these people, first to put them there, then to keep them there, and then to give them special advantages, finally voting them bounties. Yet not one of these facts is referred to. I am quite content that this incident should be buried, even with regard to those behind the political responsible heads who committed these oversights, but the misfortune is that such slanders tell against us very much. Not only this answer, but other official references on which I do not wish to dwell have created an idea that the Australian Government, while clamouring for everything to be done in the New Hebrides, is at the same time doing everything it can to impede the success of its settlers.

Mr. WINSTON CHURCHILL: No, the only suggestion made for which I have any responsibility is that the policy of the Commonwealth has not sufficiently considered the interests of British colonization in the New Hebrides. It is quite possible now, in fact it is recognised even in that answer to the question, that the Commonwealth Government is now taking a different view, and perhaps if that view had been taken at an earlier stage, the disproportion between the British and French settlers would not have been as great as it is.

Mr. DEAKIN: Not at all; that is another of Sir Everard's mistakes.

Mr. WINSTON CHURCHILL: We are bound to believe statements made upon the authority of our Governor and representative; it is a great pity that we cannot discuss over the telephone with you in Australia the answers which have to be given in the House of Commons. I am sure I