

The Newcastle Chronicle
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THE ESCAPED FRENCH PRISONERS

M. Henri Rochefort, M. Pascal Grousset and M. Francis Jourde – three of the six State prisoners that escaped by the P.C.E. which arrived here on Friday from New Caledonia – arrived safely in Sydney, on Saturday morning. They were congratulated during the day by several of their countrymen, who waited upon them at the Hotel de France, corner of King and George streets. The other three, namely M. Olivier Pain, M. Achille Bailliere and M. Cavan Grant Achille [*sic*] still remain at Newcastle, where they will remain until remittances are received from Paris. They visited Maitland on Saturday and returned yesterday morning. M. Rochefort and his two friends that accompanied him to Sydney, will proceed by the first opportunity to London, where they will take up their quarters, and, assisted by others, will act as counsel of advice to M. Gambetta and the members of that section of French politicians who have not felt it prudent to take any very active part hitherto without such counsel. For this reason, it was not considered prudent that any other than a passive resistance should be offered until these arrangements could be offered [*sic*]. But on their arrival in London the plan to be adopted will be greatly influenced by the course the existing Government may take.

There are in New Caledonia, at the present time, 3600 Communist prisoners – 2800 are in the island of Ducos, and about 800 at Noumea. Of these, only about ten or twelve held distinguished positions in the Commune, and for whose liberation measures have been taken and funds raised. The expense attending the escape of the six prisoners that reached Newcastle is, we are informed, about £1000. The Government in New Caledonia finds the control and custody of these men a very perplexing business. Held as State Prisoners, they refuse to work, preferring to support themselves from their own private resources. Their custody is more irksome to the French Government than would be their liberation, while it is a source of irritation to the French people to have these men exiled for crimes which are as chargeable on M. Thiers, Marshall Mac Mahon and those who took part in the Government that superseded the Empire, as in these men. The escaped prisoners say that their objects and acts are greatly misrepresented. They assert that when the Republic was proclaimed and MM. Thiers and Mac Mahon accepted the position they took under the revolution, the people of Paris demanded as the compliment of that change, the right of corporate Government for the City of Paris, and the other cities of France, like our own City Councils such as had been enjoyed previous to the setting up of the Empire, and that it was when the provisional Government showed the same disposition as the Empire to act on the principle of centralization that recourse was had to arms and that the hostages were taken only with a view to stop the effusion of blood by Mac Mahon's soldiery. The murder of the Archbishop of Paris with the others when shot, as well as the acts of vandalism which were committed when the public buildings were destroyed, was the work of an infuriated mob. They have called at our office to repudiate the imputations that Communes entertained the principles and objects imputed to that body. They are all men of property and always entertained a respect for property and the maintenance of society, with all the rights enjoyed by private individuals in civilized society.