

The population other than European is approximately as follows:—

|             |     |     |     |     |     |         |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Fijians     | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 115,600 |
| Polynesians | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 6,540   |
| Indians     | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2,300   |
| Total       |     |     |     |     |     | 124,440 |

Thus the total number of persons unfitted for political freedom, and requiring the special protection of Government, is to the European population as fifty is to one, speaking in round numbers.

The permanent European population at present consists, as stated by the petitioners, of about 2,500 persons. Of these, not fewer than 1,000 are women and children. The remaining 1,500 consist of landed proprietors, planters, merchants, and persons of the non-proprietary class, such as estate managers, overseers, clerks, artisans, shopmen, and others. Persons of this latter class form a large proportion of the 1,500 adult male population, and from the nature of their positions and avocations may be regarded individually less as permanent than temporary residents in the Colony.

The European population actually moving independently in the matter of the petition under consideration, consists probably of not more than 500 persons.

Whether the system of government in force in the Colony gives this very small, though wealthy and intelligent, minority adequate political representation, or whether practical means exist of bringing a proper influence to bear upon the Government, may be considered hereafter.

Adverting now to those paragraphs of the petition setting forth the subjects of grievance under which the petitioners conceive they labour, paragraph 8 may be first considered. This paragraph is to the effect "that the votes of the official members of the Legislative Council are recorded as His Excellency may direct, notwithstanding that their personal opinion may be at variance with his own." It is only necessary to say, in answer to this, that, in the absence of the principle to which such grave exception is taken, no system of government whatever, not even parliamentary government, could be carried on. It would be a very singular spectacle to see Cabinet Ministers voting with the Opposition, and assisting to upset the Government of which they were members; yet it is the possibility of an extraordinary procedure something analogous to this, that the petitioners desire. It is, however, well known in the Colony that, excepting upon questions involving a principle upon which the Government intends to insist, the votes of the official members are given at their individual discretion, and, with the experience afforded by an uninterrupted continuance in office since the foundation of the Colony, I can testify that, with the above exception, individual official members generally give expression to their personal opinions in that practical manner.

Paragraph 9 of the petition also shows a want of knowledge as to the powers of the Legislative Council. It is true that the Governor alone can propose any charge upon the public revenue (unless any proposal for expenditure has been expressly allowed by him previously to its proposal); but any member of Council may propose to reduce intended expenditure to such a sum as may seem to him fit, or he may move that it be struck out altogether; and it is needless to say that this power has been exercised, though perhaps seldom. The necessity for the exercise of extreme economy and caution has, in this Colony, hitherto been great, yet in actual practice the official and not the non-official members of Council have exercised restraining influences in matters of public expenditure.

As regards paragraph 10, the petitioners are not liable to the charge that they are badly informed. In this instance, it is right to say "that, during the eight years the Council has existed, no single ordinance has become law when introduced by a non-official member;" but, considering that the following have been the only attempts of non-official members to introduce legislation, the fact stated may not appear to form any serious matter for complaint:—On the 20th June, 1878, the Hon. R. B. Leefe introduced a measure for the amendment of the Native-labour Ordinance, No. X. of 1877. The actual object of the proposed measure, stripped of its verbal pretensions, was to enable planters, under certain circumstances, to acquire the enforced services of Fijian villagers. On the 1st October, 1878, the Hon. R. B. Leefe introduced another Ordinance, the effect of which was to encourage the manufacture of coir rope within the Colony. This measure proposed to offer a bonus of £500 to the first settler who made                      tons of coir rope. On the 17th December, 1879, the Hon. R. B. Leefe introduced a Bill to provide for the eradication of a weed known as *Sida retusa*. No seconder being found among the non-official members, it was seconded by the Colonial Secretary, and, after considerable discussion, the motion was lost, the sense of the Council being against it.

Considering, therefore, that in no instances other than in the trifling and unimportant cases quoted has a non-official member evinced any desire to introduce a legislative measure to Council, it does not appear that this complaint has any good foundation.

The 12th paragraph states that the revenue of the Colony has now reached a total of at least £90,000 per annum; that the European inhabitants are the principal contributors, directly or indirectly, thereof; and that such revenue exceeds the present expenditure of the Colony. This proposition is one that has been frequently advanced. Over and over again it has been asserted, that the whole of the native population passes its time in working to procure the amount of its assessed taxes, and that at most they only contribute some few shillings per annum to the revenue of the colony. In short, the statements so made, and the inference to be drawn from the paragraph of the petition now under consideration, are alike, and mean that, speaking generally, the whole trade of the Colony is created by and for its European population. Never was a greater fallacy urged. In the first place, it may be said that, admitting that the sum of £90,000 named in the petition represents the gross actual receipts of the year last past, it does not follow, and in fact it is not the case, that revenue proper amounts to that sum, a very considerable portion of receipts coming under the head of immigration and miscellaneous receipts (which are only matters of account), of land sales and survey charges, of fees of office, postal dues, pilot, light, and harbour dues, &c. These latter are fees for services rendered, and rendered, it may be added, exclusively to the European population, or nearly so.