

COLOURED LABOUR ON MAIL STEAMERS.

Trades Hall Council, Melbourne, 29th January, 1895.

To Chairman and Members of Postal Conference.

GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE been instructed by the Trades Hall Council to write and protest against any extension of the Mail Contract to the P & O Steamship Company as long as they continue to employ coloured labour on their boats.

For some years we have, as well as the Councils of the various colonies, endeavoured to have this injustice rectified, and have received promises from the various Governments that when the question of a renewal of the service arrived the matter would be considered.

From the expressions of the various Postmasters-General they are unanimous upon this question, and we are of opinion, from the attitude of the last Conference which sat in New Zealand, that a strong protest should be forwarded to the Imperial Government, in fact, the Conference, in our judgment, should not consent to any renewal unless white labour is employed.

As the taxpayers of the colonies are called upon to pay a heavy subsidy, they certainly object to being brought into competition with alien races. Further, the various Australasian Governments from time to time have thought it wise to pass Acts in the various Legislatures restricting aliens, this being so, the employment of these on the boats carrying Her Majesty's mails cannot be justified. Cheap labour, in our judgment, is dear labour, and though under ordinary circumstances coloured labour is endurable while everything is going right, they have neither the strength nor stamina nor the brain power to rise to the occasion if the necessity arose, and the consequences to a vessel so manned in a moment of calamity would be too terrible to contemplate.

If the Orient Company, whose fleet is equal if not superior to the P & O., can employ white labour, surely it is no injustice to compel a subsidised company to comply to these conditions.

Trusting that the Conference will carry out this much-desired and necessary reform,

Yours faithfully,

J G BARRETT, Secretary Trades Hall Council.

Sydney
Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company,
28th January, 1895.

SIR,

AT the deputation which waited on you on the 23rd instant, in reference to the employment of native crews on board mail steamers, I find according to the newspaper reports that several utterly wrong statements were made by some of the gentlemen present, and apparently allowed to go unchallenged.

In the first place I would like to mention that "Coolies," who are a low type of labourer employed in India for unskilled labour, are not to be found in any capacity on board this Company's vessels. Lascars are British subjects, and are skilled sailors from the West Coast of India. They have for years and years past been employed to the entire satisfaction of the Directors and all the Commanders and Officers of this Company. To say that they cannot be relied on in cases of emergency is simply doing a great and wicked injustice to a hardworking, brave, and deserving class of Her Majesty's subjects. In the case of the "Tasmania," I am sorry that one of the gentlemen who waited on you should have thought fit to again repeat a statement which his interest in the subject should have enabled him to satisfy himself was incorrect. This he could have done by applying to me or any one knowing something about the Board of Trade enquiry which took place in London, and which conclusively proved that the natives behaved under appallingly trying conditions in a most admirable manner, and that those who lost their lives did so at their posts while doing their duty. As you are no doubt aware, not a single passenger was lost.

The reason of this Company employing Native crews in preference to Europeans is, that after many years experience of both, the former have proved themselves to be in every way more satisfactory. The immediate reason for doing away with European crews in the lower grades was that they caused an infinity of trouble through drunkenness and disobedience, &c. As a matter of fact the employment of Lascars costs the Company more than if they employed Europeans, for the reason that the former are kept and paid all the year round, whereas the latter are as a rule signed off the articles on their arrival in London.

The only steamers of the British India Company on which Lascar crews are not carried are those of the Queensland Royal Mail Company, who are compelled very much against their will to carry European crews. To my certain knowledge the Queensland Royal Mail Company have not benefited by the change, and if they had their choice they would doubtless revert to the employ-