

understood, now being made to extend the Contract till 1898, and from a letter of Mr Prendergast, M.P., Victoria, he learned that their delegates were prepared to strongly oppose any further extension unless white labour was introduced to the P & O. Co.'s boats. The same determination was held by South Australian delegates. The seamen and the workers of New South Wales who contribute the money that subsidises the boats thought they should be manned by Europeans, and New South Wales—and this city especially—thought that something should be done to create an Australian mercantile marine. Newspapers lately had given considerable prominence to what they called "The disappearance of the Australian seaman," but they who had been on the coast for years were inclined to think he had not yet been developed. But in this way he could be encouraged by giving employment to men of our own race. As regards manning the Navy, the mercantile marine should form a nursery for the creation of seamen who could be called upon when required in times of danger and emergency.

In Queensland the stipulation was made that white labour should be employed, and the same thing applied in New Zealand, and in regard to other lines trading out of this port such as the Oceanic (American) line, and the Vancouver line. A Conference now sitting in Sydney had desired these representations to be made, and had expressed also a strong wish that some regulation should be inserted in the contracts that a minimum wage should be paid. Recently, in a contract given by our own Government, the people who had got the contract expressed themselves willing to pay certain wages, and the seamen trusted them, but the gentlemen who got the contract had taken advantage of their position to alter the wage rate. The seamen were aggrieved at this. The opinion in South Australia and Victoria was strong on this matter, and they as well as the seamen here desire to have this question finally adjusted by a decision that only European crews shall be employed. It was against the policy of the country to say that people of our own race shall be shoved out of employment and men of another race used for the object of enriching a few people. There was an almost unanimous feeling amongst seamen that no contract should be given to any steamship line inclined to employ Asiatic crews, and he asked Mr Cook to use his best endeavors to have the matter settled.

Mr JEWELL supported what had been said by the previous speakers, and said that he asked the Minister to take up a stand not alone on behalf of the seamen, but of the taxpayers in general.

Mr. M'LEAN said if these coloured men were trading to and from their own ports, say from India to Britain, it would be different, but he thought they should be stopped trading to an Australian port, and the boats manned by Australian seamen. Newspapers talked about the disappearance of the Australian seaman, and asked why Australians did not go to sea? They did not go because they had very little opportunity, and when they did wages earned were very small, and they had to go among coloured men. The Orient Co. paid white crews about £4 10s. per month, whilst Asiatics get about 30s. They are no good to this country, and do not spend anything in it. The Government ought to assist them to become seamen on board our own mail boats by abolishing coloured labour from them. He had been on the coast 16 years.

Mr NOONAN, who had been on the coast 13 years, said there was a lot of dissatisfaction about coloured labour, and it was not right to employ it between England and Australia—two white countries—and he did not see how it could be stopped unless the Government put it in the contract. He alluded to the loss of the "*Quetta*" as an instance of the bad results of coloured labour.

Mr J. C. WATSON, M.P., sympathised entirely with the objects of the deputation.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said: I may say at once that I am in hearty sympathy with your desire to replace black or coolie labour on the P and O boats with white. From inquiries I have made on this subject, it appears to me that the P and O Co. is really the only Company now which runs boats to our ports manned with coolie labour. I understand the British India Co. have dispensed with this kind of labour, and now employ only European crews. There can be no doubt that the strongest point made is that the sister Company now employs white labour. That, to my mind, is the answer to all the objections made. It has been averred that the white labour is not so amenable to discipline: that I do not believe, and never did. The fact that white labour is preferred on the sister line is sufficient answer to such objections. Why the P and O Co. prefers to use black labour in preference to white I have never been able to understand, except on the score of cheapness. Well, on that matter, it has always seemed to me that as we are partners in this agreement to such an extent, paying as we do £75,000 a year to the two Companies, we ought to say at once that the subsidy we pay shall be for the purpose of assisting ships to employ our own labour in preference to this coolie labour. I take it that the test of this labour, or rather this race, question, is the indisposition on the part of the people to mix. I understand that these boats do not attempt to mix the coloured labour with the European: there must be, therefore, an impassable barrier of some kind, and the Company evidently makes a choice between two kinds of labour. Certainly that choice should be made in favour of white men. Another point seems a strong one,—that most of these vessels are made available to the Admiralty in case of war, and it is a fact that if a war broke out we would not think of manning these ships for war purposes with this kind of labour. I think it is a point that ought to weigh very much with the Admiralty at home. When they make arrangements for these ships to be available, they should also make some provision to ensure white crews who would pull together. You speak of co-operation with the other Colonies, and I am glad in a matter of this kind that you recognise that.