

Most of the outstanding applications relate either to investigation of titles or determination of rights of succession. A limiting factor on Native Land Court work is the necessity for surveys, and steps have been taken to secure additional survey staff. During the year, the Native Land Court spent a considerable period in Aitutaki dealing with claims for compensation for land taken for the airstrip there. As work in respect of the Penrhyn airstrip still remains to be done, it is hoped that the Court will be able to visit Penrhyn in the new year.

8. PUBLIC SERVICE

The chief administrative services of Treasury, Customs, Justice, Agriculture, Health, Education, and Public Works are directed by officers recruited largely from New Zealand to the Cook Islands Public Service.

Apart from such key positions, however, the bulk of the personnel of the Service are Natives, and it is the objective of the Administering Authority to staff the Service, as far as possible, from local sources, the only limiting factor being the necessity for a higher standard of education and ability in the more responsible positions.

PART II.—SOCIAL CONDITIONS

9. LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

There is wide variation in types of employment in the different islands. On the barren atolls in the Northern Group the Natives subsist largely on coconuts and fish, and there is little opportunity for them to engage in other pursuits which would provide exports and a consequent higher living standard. In the pearl islands of Manihiki and Penrhyn, numbers are employed in diving for shell, which they find more profitable employment than wresting a living from the land. It is in the fertile islands of the Southern Group that most of the population is concentrated, and labour is required for the growing, harvesting, packing, and shipment of fruit and copra, the staple exports on which living standards depend. As most of the land in these islands is held by family groups under customary title, the bulk of the people are engaged in work on their own plantations. There is, however, opportunity for wage-earners in the administrative Departments, in plantation work, and in the handling of fruit for export.

Wage standards are fixed for all types of such work following the sittings of the special Wages Tribunal in 1946, referred to in the annual report for last year. Further progress in the field of employment relations has been initiated by the passing of the Cook Islands Industrial Union Regulations 1947, resulting in the registration on 12th July, 1947, of the Cook Islands (Except Niue) Industrial Union of Workers. This union embraces all classes of workers, many being engaged in different kinds of employment from time to time according to the labour demand. The union is affiliated to the New Zealand Federation of Labour. Membership is not compulsory for any worker, and there is at present no provision for preference in regard to employment being given to union members.

Provision is made in the regulations for the settlement of industrial disputes by conciliation or, failing voluntary settlement, by decision of an Industrial Relations Officer appointed from the Cook Islands Public Service. Appeal from such decisions is to an Industrial Magistrate appointed by the Minister of Island Territories for the purpose.

Basic wage-rates for labourers range from 7s. to 9s. per day, and for more responsible work up to 18s. per day.

During the year the only industrial trouble centred on the waterfront, where certain difficulties arose between groups affiliated to the new union and other organizations actuated by sectional interests.

Concurrently with the development of unionism, a body known as the Cook Islands Progressive Association, which had been formed earlier in Auckland primarily for the purpose of looking after the interests of Cook Islanders in New Zealand, became