

With regard to cold storage of fruit, the Minister stated that experiments had been made, but it had not yet been definitely decided that oranges would stand it. It was a question whether the cells of the fruit would not be so damaged by the cold storage as to render them unfit for sale purposes. The danger was that it was very easy to overheat the fruit. Further experiments were being conducted now, and, if they proved successful, consideration would be given to the question of erecting cool storage for this purpose on the island. He wanted, however, to be perfectly plain with the islanders. The New Zealand Government looked to them to assist themselves. They could not expect New Zealand to establish cool storage without the island itself bearing a fair share of the burden of the cost.

With regard to the matters mentioned in the petition, every care would be taken to try and see if suitable notification of the arrival of the steamers could be arranged. Respecting an Island Bank, unsuccessful efforts had been made to get one of the New Zealand banking institutions to open a branch on the island. The Commissioner had now commenced to inaugurate a Credit Bank, and before many weeks were past it would be an established fact. The Government would assist the Commissioner as far as lay in its power in seeing that the Natives got their fair share of the space on the Union Company's steamers. The company had promised to give them the same space this season.

As to the opposition to a European being put into the Island Council, this raised a somewhat difficult question, which the members of the Parliamentary Party were asked to study during their stay on the island. The Native population on Rarotonga was about three thousand, and the white population about one hundred and fifty. The whites were subject to a small amount of taxation, and the principle arose that was observed in New Zealand—namely, that those who paid taxation should have a certain amount of representation. The people of New Zealand would be very glad to know that some arrangement had been come to by which the whites received some kind of representation. The New Zealand Government knew that when the islands had been annexed provision had been made that Native local government should be sustained and maintained. We did not break our word, and had no intention of breaking it; but he did invite them to consider the position from the point of view of the white residents who were living among them. Should the day come when the Arikis, the Mataiapos, and the rest of the people were willing to include in their rolls the names of the whites it would be not a complete but a partial solution of the difficulty. He thought, too, the Arikis and the Mataiapos might consider the question of altering the system of nomination to the Council—that the three representatives of the tribes now nominated should be elected by the tribes. They might at the same time consider the question that he had alluded to of including the names of the whites on the rolls, so that they might vote at these elections. He invited them to consider these suggestions, and to consult with the Resident Commissioner regarding them.

As to drainage, the Administration would be very glad indeed to help them to drain their lands.

With respect to trade matters generally, there were three Trade Commissioners with the Parliamentary Party who had come down especially to inquire into trade matters. The Minister invited the fruitgrowers to select one or more of their members to see the Commissioners, and put before them all the matters they wished so that they might be dealt with in the Commission's report.

Mr. ISITT suggested the Minister might emphasize the fact that the Natives owed something to the Europeans.

The Hon. Sir JAMES ALLEN, continuing, said that a great deal had been done for the Natives by the advent of the European, and also by the taxpayer and the Government of New Zealand. New Zealand contributed about £8,000 annually towards the upkeep of the Cook Islands, and the Dominion could not be expected to do more than bear its fair share of the burden. We deserved some sympathy and consideration from the Natives themselves in this matter, but we wanted the sympathy to be sustained. We also desired the Natives to realize that we were trying to help them, and that there was something due to the New Zealand people and the New Zealand taxpayer in this respect.

DEPUTATION FROM TRADERS OF RAROTONGA.

Present: Hon. Sir James Allen (Minister of External Affairs) and members of the Parliamentary Party; Mr. F. W. Platts (Resident Commissioner).

Mr. H. FISHER, representing the Cook Islands Trading Company, with headquarters at Rarotonga, stated: We desire to place before you the disabilities and hardships under which we have been suffering for some considerable time. They are very heavy. Our request is a simple one—the right to be heard in self-defence. We have been charged publicly. Gross accusations have been made against us and our integrity. We are looked upon by those who have seen the charges made against us as men of indifferent character. The firms here are reputable business firms. The three biggest firms are New Zealand firms—registered in New Zealand. All we ask is that we be granted a fair inquiry, an opportunity to defend ourselves against these charges. If the Government of New Zealand grants our request we ask that the Commission of Inquiry be given full power to call for documents and take evidence on oath. It has been suggested that the Natives have not received fair prices for their produce. Responsible officials down here have told the Natives that they have not received a fair price. The Resident Commissioner, at a Council meeting held in November, 1918, told the Natives that there was a "ring" on the island formed with the intention of keeping the price of copra down—that the Natives were not receiving a fair price. The same statements are repeated in the Commissioner's annual report: "During the past two years there have been repeated complaints by the Natives of the operations of combines.