

Indentured labour consisted of two classes—the Solomon-Islanders, employed by the D.H. and P.G., and the Chinese, employed by other persons and firms. Generally speaking the Solomon-Islanders were employed for coconuts and the Chinamen for cocoa and rubber. In 1914 there were 870 Solomon-Islanders employed by the D.H. and P.G., and 1,855 Chinamen in other employ. The latest figures showed the number of Solomon-Islanders to have fallen to 485 and Chinese to 600. Some had been repatriated since these figures were compiled. To keep the plantations going the D.H. and P.G. required 770 labourers, while others needed 1,640. Other plantations, which had fallen out of cultivation and were in the Administrator's hands for liquidation, would require from 500 to 800 labourers if they were to be maintained. Thus from 2,900 to 3,200 labourers were required to maintain the plantations in good order, without providing for one acre of further development. It would thus be seen that 2,000 labourers beyond those at present engaged were needed. There was indentured labour and free labour. With respect to indentured labour, a contract was made between the labourer and the employer whereby the labourer worked for a specified term for specified wages. Provision for repatriation at the end of the term was made. The labourer might be punished by the proper Government authority for desertion: that was to say, having made the contract he must stick to it. The labourer's medical attendance was paid for by the employer. He was protected in that he had his own Consul in the country, and there was an officer specially told off for the purpose of seeing that complaints were properly dealt with. The lecturer said he had been given to understand that during the military occupation no complaint had come in from an indentured labourer which indicated any ill-treatment. The protection appeared to him to be quite complete. The complaints were almost entirely of a trivial nature.

Mr. McCOMBS: What are the hours of work and pay?

Colonel TATE said at present there were all sorts of rates of pay, because so many fresh contracts had been made during the last year and because men had become so skilled. The pay ranged from £2 10s. or £3 per month and found up to a very much larger sum. With reference to free labour, what he understood by "free labour" was where, however the contract might be made, the man was free to remain in Samoa and become a citizen of the place. In this way there would be created a citizen of a lower type than the Samoan Native, and there would also be created a citizen of a man who was not under control. The only other labour in Samoa was the native Samoan. The statement was not altogether true that the Samoan did not work, but he did not work in the way in which the Europeans understood the term. He did not work with the energy that labourers put into their work in New Zealand, but at the same time he achieved a good deal in his own way. He was not a person who simply sat in the sun and grew fat. Not only did he keep in hand the beetle, which, if unchecked, would kill all the coconuts, but he also produced a considerable proportion of the copra. In a very little time he could, by making copra, amass what was quite a large sum of money for him. As he could easily make sufficient for his wants he did not need to work for wages. In a few isolated cases an employer might get Samoan Natives to do a copra task for him, but it would be done more to oblige the employer than from a desire to go out as labourers. In a nutshell the position was that the Samoan was not available at present as a labourer because he already did sufficient work to keep him going. If the growing of cocoa and rubber was to continue outside labour must be available. Samoan labour had been tried for many things, such as roadmaking and harbour-work, and it had always proved unsatisfactory. As to white labour, the members of the Parliamentary Party would satisfy themselves when they visited Samoa that it was not a white man's country. Outside labour from the Pacific had proved impracticable. Chinese labour was available. If indentured it could be controlled; if free it could not be controlled.

He did not think the introduction of Chinese labour had had a demoralizing effect upon the natives of Samoa. There was a little cross breeding between the Natives and the Chinese, but not much. A regulation had been made with the object of preventing this, but what controlled the matter mostly was the fact that the indentured labourer was not allowed off his area: further, the Samoans were very particular about their own women.

In reply to a question by Mr. Holland concerning indentured Chinese labour, the Hon. Sir James Allen stated that last session the Government had undertaken not to introduce more labour than was necessary to make up about the number of men that were there. Steps had been taken to secure a few hundred labourers from China, and the position was that a new Consul for China had been appointed who was presently to go to Samoa. He had been communicated with and the Chinese Government had been communicated with. This gentleman was himself selecting the labourers to go to Samoa. In addition the Administrator had selected Captain Carter, who had been sent to China with full particulars as to the conditions. All these conditions were being explained to the Chinese Consul, and, through him, to the labourers who were going to be brought to Samoa.

Continuing, Colonel TATE said the Government of the Natives was carried out by Native officials drawn from themselves. The head of the family was known as a "Matai." Then came the officials proper, ranked in five different grades: (1) the Pulenu'u, (2) the Faamasino, (3) the Komisi, (4) the Faipule, and (5) the Fautuas.

The Pulenu'u might be called the Mayor of the village, and was a very busy man. He administered everything connected with the beetle-catching. He inspected and weighed the copra. The cleanliness of the village was his business, and it was his duty also to settle small family troubles. Next in rank came the Faamasino, the Native Judge, whose main function was to settle disputes between the villagers. The Komisi was the Native member of the Land and Titles Commission, which was a Court of very considerable importance. It was the final Court in cases of dispute arising out of land-titles. The Faipule was a member of a sort of Native Parliament.