

With this much to go upon, the Delegation arrived in Rarotonga on Saturday evening, 11th July (New Zealand time Sunday, 12th July).

Some packing-sheds were in operation on the following day, packing fruit for the arrival of the R.M.S. "Maunganui" on the 13th, and advantage was taken of this circumstance to visit these sheds and inspect the methods employed.

The following day (Monday, 13th) a visit was paid to the "Maunganui" at her anchorage, and the methods of stowing the fruit cargoes on board ship were inspected. The methods of carting fruit from packing-shed to wharf, its lighterage to ship's side, and handling were also observed.

On Tuesday, 14th, the Delegation met a representative gathering of growers, traders, and others interested for the purpose of discussing and agreeing upon a proposed programme of investigatory work.

The Delegation proposed that, before commencing to take evidence, it would visit as many plantations on the Island as possible, and in this way, and by conversation with planters, Native and European, make its members thoroughly acquainted with the conditions under which the industry is carried on.

After discussion this was agreed upon, and with the willing and helpful assistance of growers of all classes this programme was duly carried out on 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd July.

This inspection of plantations involved some very arduous days of tramping up valleys into the mountains, and inspecting areas of bananas and oranges in what were apparently almost inaccessible situations. Every day, by appointment, the growers of each district assembled and accompanied the Delegation on their tour of inspection, the planters explaining their position and difficulties, and enabling the Delegation to acquire much useful information in regard to conditions on the plantations.

Apart from the practical value of these inspections their psychological value in securing the confidence and good will of the growers, who were impressed by the willingness of the Delegation to undertake such strenuous work, was incalculable. The wisdom of the course adopted was also amply shown in the results, as, when the taking of evidence commenced in the Courthouse at Avarua on Thursday, 23rd July, members of the Delegation were in a position to judge the value of the evidence afforded to an extent that could not have been otherwise possible.

The taking of evidence continued until Monday, 27th July, and, pending the arrival of the T.S.M.V. "Matua," by which vessel the Delegation were to proceed to the Outer Islands of Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke, and Mangaia, the time was occupied in attending Native and other gatherings arranged in honour of the Delegation, inspecting schools and other Government activities, and in deliberating on the evidence already heard.

PART V.—ATTITUDE OF WITNESSES.

After opening the inquiry at Avarua, it soon became common ground with the members of the Delegation that the two petitions originally presented to Parliament were not actually in conflict; and before the taking of evidence had concluded it was quite obvious that all growers, irrespective of what petition they had signed, were prepared to support any policy that would raise the level of prices paid to the growers of fruit.

Varied opinions as to the degree of control that would be advantageous were expressed by the thirty-six witnesses, and it must be confessed that many of them had very hazy ideas as to what form control should take.

PART VI.—SURVEY OF ISLAND FRUIT INDUSTRY.

To use a common simile, the fruit trade of the Cook Islands may be likened to a chain of four links:—

- (1) Growing and cultivation of fruit;
- (2) Transport to packing-sheds, grading, and packing;
- (3) Transport to ships and shipping; and
- (4) Marketing methods in New Zealand.

These four stages of the industry are co-related as are the links of a chain, and in the opinion of the Delegation there are at present weaknesses existing in each link. Any remedy which would apply to any of them and not to all would therefore be ineffective, as the weakness in any remaining link would nullify largely any improvement made in the others.

ISLAND PRODUCTS.

The most important products of the Cook Islands from a commercial standpoint are oranges, bananas, tomatoes, and copra.

Average yearly fruit shipments over the past twelve years have been—Citrus, 110,000 cases; bananas, 53,000 cases; and tomatoes, 44,500 cases.

The orange season extends approximately from April to September. Bananas are an all-the-year crop, and tomatoes are exported from June to October and November, shipments tapering off entirely in December. Copra-production suffered badly in the hurricane of last year. In any event the collapse of the copra-market during the last few years made it an unpayable crop.

ORANGE INDUSTRY.

GROWING AND CULTIVATION OF FRUIT.

The Cook Islands native orange, in its high juice content and flavour, compares more than favourably with any other orange imported into New Zealand.