

Australian manufacturers enjoy several advantages which greatly increase the difficulties of the Rarotongan producer. The chief of these are—(a) The difference in the freight rates to New Zealand—i.e., 55s. per ton from Rarotonga and 35s. from Australia (this represents an advantage to Australia of 4d. per gallon); (b) Australian producers obtain supplies of glass containers in Australia, whereas Rarotongan producers have to obtain supplies from the same source and pay freight and shipping charges on empty containers to Rarotonga.

This additional cost is 5½d. per gallon. The Island producers have asked for a tariff to be imposed on Australian juice sufficient to enable the sale of Island juice in New Zealand at a price which will show them a profit of 10 per cent.

The Delegation considers this request reasonable and commends it to Government for favourable action.

PART XII.—ALLEGED POVERTY.

Some witnesses who gave evidence in Wellington stressed the extreme poverty of the Native growers of Rarotonga in particular. "Poverty" is a relative term, and must be considered in relation to the accepted standard of living in the country under consideration. That poverty exists amongst the Natives of Rarotonga there can be no doubt; that it exists to the extent that people are starving is definitely incorrect. After the hurricane of last year there was inevitably a shortage of some staple foods, but in ordinary conditions where bananas, coconuts, and other tropical foods grow practically wild, and where the sea abounds in fish, it is inconceivable that actual starvation can occur.

PART XIII. ADMINISTRATION.

It was not possible to deal adequately with the fruit trade of the Cook Islands, being as it is the basis of the economic life of the community, without coming into intimate contact with the Administration in its various functions. The Delegation is pleased to report, after careful observation, that the personnel of the Administration is of a high standard. Complaints were made at various times and places, but investigation showed that whatever legitimate grievances exist the fault lay rather with the machinery of administration than in its personnel.

We found an impression existing amongst a section of Native growers that the Administration was indifferent or hostile to the interests of the Native growers, and one witness stated before the Committee in Wellington that Judge Ayson, Resident Commissioner, was friendly to the interests of the traders and hostile to growers.

A perusal of the files in the Department at Rarotonga and the evidence did not bear this out, but showed conclusively that the Resident Commissioner has at all times regarded the Native growers' interests as paramount. It is gratifying to record that the witness Mr. McBirney, who made the statement in New Zealand, has since hearing the evidence given in Rarotonga, withdrawn his statement and asked that it be expunged from the evidence.

The Resident Agents in the four Outer Islands visited maintain a high standard of administrative efficiency considering their isolation from European influence and other difficulties.

New Zealand has much cause for satisfaction at the high calibre of the officials of the Administration and their constant determination to make the interests of the Natives their first consideration.

PART XIV.—REGULAR VISITS OF REPRESENTATIVES OF NEW ZEALAND PARLIAMENT.

The Delegation is strongly of opinion that a closer liaison should be maintained between these outlying parts of our Dominion and Parliament. The last parliamentary visit to the Cook Group was in 1920—sixteen years ago. The Delegation found in the Group a body of opinion in favour of some form of representation for the Group in Parliament. While it is true that this represents only an articulate minority, it would, in our opinion, be unwise to entirely disregard it. In the meantime, whatever constitutional changes we think the future may hold, we feel that some method whereby regular visits of representatives of the New Zealand Parliament could be carried out would be of great advantage. The means to bring this about we commend to the consideration of the Government.

PART XV.—ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

The Delegation is indebted to Mr. S. J. Smith, Secretary for the Cook Islands, who accompanied the members to Rarotonga, and whose knowledge of the problems and ever-ready assistance were invaluable; to Judge H. F. Ayson, Resident Commissioner, for the arrangements made to facilitate the work at Rarotonga and for many courtesies extended; to all sections of the community, both European and Maori, for the spirit of helpful co-operation, in all matters, which greatly assisted the Delegation to arrive at its conclusions; and to the Union Steamship Co., Ltd., for placing the T.S.M.V. "Matua" at its disposal for the purpose of visiting the Lower Cook Islands.