

well agreed not to insist upon the mail boats providing cold storage for Australian products. We recognise that England must have a large say in this matter as well as ourselves, she being the largest contributor and has a very strong feeling in the matter. Some of her arguments, no doubt, are very cogent—for instance, that in which she says she could not be expected to contribute towards the cost of carrying Australian produce. I think we might very well let that go by the board. With regard to the other matter, that of manning the boats with white labour only; that is one that does not present difficulties of the kind which the other does. The London Office goes into the question at some length, and makes, I may say, some rather sarcastic remarks. There is some fine irony in the sentence in which they “see a difficulty in defining the shade of colour which would render sailors eligible, &c.” I have only to say in reply to that that we are forced from our point of view to raise this question, and we are forced by reason that the shipowners themselves make a choice between the two kinds of labour. If they simply left the matter open and employed indiscriminately black or white labour as it came along, it would be different; but they themselves religiously exclude from their boats any white labour whatever so far as the lower class of labour is concerned. (Dr. COCKBURN: You don't say the “Orient”?) I am speaking of course of the P. and O. Company only. So that while it may be a point of difficulty with the British Government, it is also a point of difficulty with regard to the Colonies. We are compelled to make a choice because the company, with the concurrence evidently of the British Government, makes a choice which involves the exclusion of white labor; and in self defence, and in justice to our own people living amongst us and subject to the same conditions of life as we are, I think we should simply say—“Since we have to pay these ships handsomely for carrying our mails, they should carry our own labour in preference to that which does not assimilate to our mode of life.” That is my view of the matter, and I hold it very strongly.

The Hon. Mr. DUFFY: Of course, the difficulty in this matter is that we are not the predominant partner. Not only is the Imperial Government the largest proprietor, but we are not even a united Australia ourselves, as Sir John Forrest takes the trouble to remind us by telegram. Mr. Fysh is indifferent in the matter, and I understand that Queensland is practically indifferent also. Only three Colonies, therefore—South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales—take any real interest in the matter. No doubt in Victoria there is a very strong feeling held that owners of mail boats should not employ coloured labour, and strong prejudice is felt in favour of the Orient as against the P. and O. Company; and we are corroborated in the practicability of this course by the action Queensland has taken already. I understand they have a mail contract with the British-India Company, under which the Company is prohibited from bringing coloured labour into Queensland, and they arrange accordingly. They employ it in other contracts, but when sending ships to Queensland they don't have a coloured crew on board. I don't know if it would be practicable for the successful tenderer for the Federal Service to adopt such a plan. Of course, if we were conducting our own mail service, I presume there would be no difficulty about it; but we only take fifteen thirty-fourths, and England nineteen thirty-fourths, and even of that smaller part, fifteen thirty-fourths, only some contributors have an interest in this question. It is very difficult, and I am not prepared to say how far we should go. At present I think we ought to wait until we get the letter from England on which that telegram we have received is based. It says “letter following,” and it is this letter with full explanations which may place us in a better position to judge; but unless the arguments are absolutely overwhelming we ought to send a reply to the Imperial Government that certain Colonies must insist that coloured labour must not be employed, or if it is we fear there will be a difficulty with our Parliaments in getting the necessary votes passed. I understand Queensland is prepared to back up the other three Colonies as regards that proceeding at all events.

The Hon. Mr. COOK: I would like to say what I omitted a moment ago, that I have just concluded an agreement with the Canadian Pacific Company, owned by Mr. Huddart, and in that agreement it is stipulated clearly that no coloured labour shall be employed, and I may say that Mr. Huddart cheerfully assented to that.

The Hon. Mr. THYNNE: It seems to me that there should be no difficulty whatever in any contract in which the Colonies have a controlling power in making such a stipulation, and it is in accordance with Australian sentiment that it should be observed. As stated by Mr. Duffy, in our contracts we have had that stipulation for many years, and in our negotiations for a renewal of the agreement as a refrigerating cargo service the same stipulation is inserted. Our Government would like to see the stipulation applicable to the Suez mail contract if it could possibly be done. Where we are lukewarm is not in the desire to have white labour employed, but in the belief that we are at all likely to succeed in getting the Imperial Government to consent to such a stipulation being inserted. We have already pressed the matter strongly on the Imperial Government, and they—although we have not yet received their full explanation as to the reasons why they refuse—we can quite see that the Imperial Government are in a difficult position, having its duties to a large number of subjects who are not white, and to whom they owe care and attention just the same as to the people of our own race. They no doubt are embarrassed with this question, and it is a matter for us to consider how far we should press upon the Imperial Government the insertion of a clause which would greatly embarrass them. That is the view which I expressed on behalf of the Queensland Government, and which I think I conveyed to the meeting of Postmasters-General which I attended at Adelaide last year. (Mr. Thynne here read a copy of the letter which he had written to Dr. Cockburn in June last, relative to the manning of mail boats by white labour, and hoping that the British Government would waive its objections in the matter.) I think that, Mr. Chairman, expresses the views which my Government holds in this matter, and which have been, I believe, communicated to the Agent-General in London in some correspondence. I should be very glad if you think there is any possibility of succeeding, to support you in this question.

The Hon. Dr. COCKBURN: It is with regret that I see no prospect of carrying out the wishes of South Australia, and of several other Colonies, in reference to cold storage, but I recognise difficulties in the way of this. There is no unanimity on the part of the Colonies; there are difficulties from the Imperial point of view, and, more than that, the requirements of the Colonies in this respect are from time to time being met by other than the mail boats, which of course alters the aspect of the case which it assumed at previous Conferences. I am reluctantly bound to admit that we cannot further press the question. About the coloured labour question, I think the best interests of the Imperial Government, the Colonies, and all English-speaking races, are identical in this matter, and I certainly think we should relax no effort to obtain the retention of this clause. (Mr. DUFFY: Hear, hear.) That is the opinion strongly held by South Australia; in fact, I raised the point at the New Zealand Conference, and supported the Chairman when